A DOUBLE CAPACITY:
SELF-PARODY IN BRITAIN'S LONG EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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SELF-PARODY IN BRITAIN'S LONG EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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Although parody has long been recognized in Swift, Sterne, and mock epic poetry, self-parody has received scant critical attention, despite its pervasive use in many types of eighteenth-century texts. My dissertation defines self-parody as a mode in which the multiple implied reader positions suggested by a text mutually critique each other. I argue that these incommensurable reader positions reveal the era's divergent political valences encoded within—and contested through—the development of generic norms. Many eighteenth-century genres responded to a cultural context that witnessed the overlap of residual Christian ideals, still-dominant aristocratic paradigms of authority, and emerging structures of the early capitalist marketplace; as these ideologies displaced one another, they nonetheless inherited and revised previous social and literary formations. This overlap allowed formal cleavages in texts so that seemingly conservative works could be inscribed by and give expression to the values of new, often marginalized, communities of readers. Novels by Horace Walpole, Clara Reeve, and Jane Austen demonstrate that the merger of realist and romance traditions in Gothic opened a space for queer counter-narratives that defied a hetero-normative and increasingly positivistic judicial system. Similarly, pastoral poetry shifted the identification of its shepherd-figures from the upper- to the lower-classes in works by Alexander Pope, John Gay, and George Crabbe, producing irresolvable class-based subject positions that precipitated Romanticism's protest against industrial exploitation. Likewise, the demise of heroic drama and the rise of bourgeois drama created generic fissures, through which plays by John Dryden, John Gay, and George Lillo explored the failure of competing gender archetypes, especially the masculinity of their putative heroes. Finally, the reception of nominally sentimental novels is often divided between sentimental and satiric interpretations; against both these views, I claim that texts by David Hume, Henry Fielding, Oliver Goldsmith, and Frances Brooke display a dramatic conception that ironically exteriorizes character into social role-playing aligned both with and against an early capitalist marketplace. My analysis of self-parodies challenges traditional readings of the Enlightenment as enacting a consolidation of hegemonic discourses that reinforced already privileged perspectives; instead, I argue, these texts demonstrate a countervailing development of more pluralistic readerships and viewpoints.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

William Joseph Cordeiro studied philosophy and cognitive science as an undergraduate at Franklin and Marshall College. In addition, he has an M.S. in Education from Brooklyn College and an M.F.A. in Creative Writing from Cornell University.

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A Lawyer is an honest Employment, so is mine. Like me too he acts in a double Capacity, both against Rogues and for 'em; for 'tis but fitting that we should protect and encourage Cheats, since we live by them.

—John Gay, *The Beggar's Opera*, Act I, Scene 1

A man's enemies will be those of his own household.

—Matthew 10:36 (*New King James Version*)

I have come to debase the coinage.

—Diogenes (trans. Guy Davenport)

Introduction

I. Toward a Definition of Self-Parody

While parody has long been a topic of considerable debate, in eighteenth century scholarship and beyond, relatively few studies have examined the subject of self-parody, despite the currency of the term in both popular culture and critical theory. Linda Hutcheon's intervention in her seminal work, *A Theory of Parody*, is to claim that parody is not necessarily a mode of ridicule, but one of establishing a critical difference that can range tonally anywhere from homage to debasement: a parody such as Picasso's *Las Meninas* is closer to a "take" or "version"—akin to a translation or redaction of Veláquez's work into a new visual idiom—than the binaries of mockery and imitation might suggest. Indeed, the parodic text may offer an implicit commentary on and dialogue with its source text that is far more nuanced than simply an attack or an appreciation. Hutcheon's theory of parody, however, relies predominantly on an analysis of twentieth-century texts, and part of her thesis is that the use of parody underwent a transformation with Modernism. She writes that a "definition of parody as ridicule that developed in tandem with the art of Pope, Swift, and Hogarth doesn't necessarily feel right today" (xii). A major contention of the present study is that the use of self-parody in eighteenth-century texts shares at least the complexity of critical response that Hutcheon discovers in her twentieth-century examples of parody.

Frederic Jameson would differentiate postmodern pastiche that does not take a determinate stance on its appropriated source text—the contemporary prevalence of which, he asserts, demonstrates the "waning of affect"—from traditional eighteenth- and nineteenth-century parody, which he claims relies on a stable background of values. Because part of my

argument is that there was *not* a stable background of values in the eighteenth century, I favor Hutcheon's claim that parody may take a variety of positions vis-à-vis its source texts. Jameson's analysis of postmodernity as symptomatic of a cultural transformation largely due to late capitalist logics may nonetheless have relevance to the similar transformation that took place in the eighteenth century during the emergence and consolidation of early mercantile capitalist institutions:

> if "Postmodernism" corresponds to what Raymond Williams meant by his fundamental cultural category, a "structure of feeling" (and one that has become "hegemonic" at that, to use another of Williams's crucial categories), then it can only enjoy that status by dint of profound collective self-transformation, a reworking and rewriting of an older system. (xiv)

If wide-spread economic and cultural transformations require a "reworking and rewriting" of older systems, then parody (in Hutcheon's sense) would be a particularly apt mode to express the ambivalences and anxieties experienced during such a time. Parody's appropriation of previous textual conventions allows its reworking and rewriting to reference the values inscribed by its source texts while critically responding to the ways that those values have been rendered incongruent by a new cultural logic that inscribes or imposes other values onto texts.

In this light, moments of societal transformation are imbricated with residual, dominant, and emergent ideologies. Parodies, by reworking older or established models, often prove capable of engendering a parallel transformation in literature by which a text contests various cultural norms and assumptions. Margaret Rose argues that:

> In work such as *Don Quixote,* in which parody has had the function of both destroying a specific target and refunctioning that target for a new audience (or for a similar audience whose expectations for the old text are to be revised) parody has been described as the transformation of one genre into another, and has been seen both as a form of literary satire and as offering a general aesthetic of the text and its reception. (34)

Don Quixote may provide an important touchstone for understanding how parody differs from self-parody. Cervantes's parody is not specific to a particular source text or author; instead, he takes the entire genre of romance as his initial target. The first part contrasts the fantasy of the outmoded romance and pastoral traditions, which contain medieval chivalric ideals, with a crasser, secular, and more materialistic early modern reality. In most cases, Cervantes can be understood as lampooning his target texts, generalized as they are. Simon Dentith writes that general parody takes as its target "a whole manner, style or discourse, sufficiently suggested by Bryon's opening invocation to a Canto of *Don Juan*: 'Hail Muse! Etc…'" (194). Just as Byron performs the conventions of classical epic in a way that foregrounds their staid conventionalism, the first part of *Don Quixote* emphasizes the disproportion between the high-flown knights in romance and its earthbound anti-hero. It stays mainly in the realm of parody.

Yet, the second part of *Don Quixote* turns into a self-parody by questioning the authenticity of the text itself, transforming the parodic romance quest into a picaresque adventure novel wherein the hero—and the text—must be differentiated from imposters. Its target turns to the metafictional status of the Don himself, who must defend his (i.e., Cervantes's) narrative against such competing "false" stories, such as those penned by Don Alonzo Fernandez de

Avellanda. In Bakhtin's idiom, the genre of the novel is paradigmatic of dialogic construction, though *Don Quixote* goes beyond even a dialogic heteroglossia. While many novels' characters debate and display a range of human drama, critics have routinely reduced the implied author to a single, stable viewpoint. The second part of *Quixote*, however, absorbs the reception of the text into itself, as Margaret Rose suggests, depicting multiple and competing reader responses. This internal contestation of the different values, norms, and conventions by which the text may be read is the crux of what I believe defines self-parody. The clearest examples of parody, by contrast, often rehearse the style, subject matter, or conventions of their source text(s) in order to induce a distinct critical response rather than a contestation of critical responses. In short, a parody frequently represents the attitude of the implied author to the source text(s), whereas a self-parody reflects the contrasting attitudes of multiple implied readers to the very text that actual readers are perusing.

In providing such a formalist account, I would regard self-parody as a mode to be largely ahistorical; or rather, for the purposes of a definition, I am abstracting to emphasize continuities in the mode across (Western) cultural and historical periods in order to arrive at a useful generalization that can circumscribe a range of exempla. Herein I am not making any claims that there has been a moment when self-parody underwent a shift in consciousness or that there was an epoch in which self-parody was invented, whether the Modern or the Early Modern period. In fact, perhaps the earliest example we have of self-parody in Western literature is the Greek satyr play. Though few remain extant, the evidence indicates that the satyr play was traditionally incorporated into the cycle of tragic plays, offering a bawdy and subversive take upon many of the same mythic heroes and epic stories represented in the tragic action. Today we often disaggregate tragedies from this context. However, if we regard Greek tragedy as the whole

cycle, given the fact that the performance was directed to the same audience, then we will likely regard these dramatic cycles as self-parodic. The differences between the tragedies and the satyr play expressed the polyvalent responses available to the Athenian audiences toward the same basic materials and storylines. The "classical" audience already recognized the potential for its tragic heroes to be spoofed as little better than high-minded nincompoops or lusty scallywags.

Likewise, a host of contemporary films and television programs demonstrate a similar tendency to incorporate diverse audience responses directly into the text itself, presenting a contestation of the values by which the text may be read. "If you don't understand this film, it's your fault and not ours," Steven Soderbergh archly declares in the guise of a director introducing his film in a theatre at the outset of his 1996 movie *Schizopolis,* to offer one instance. The film offers a deranged comic tour de force in which Soderbergh acts as director, cameraman, and actor for several character parts in a bizarre yet wholly mundane suburban world of corporate doublespeak and multiple identities. The movie challenges its audience's viewing habits in order to expose the ways our conventional reading of narrative and our expectations about film have been shaped by capitalist forces. The coherence of the film itself is threatened, for example, by a scene being interrupted by a paper that reads "Idea Missing." While this might be taken as a satire of callow Hollywood blockbusters, it could also refer to the supposed "difficulty" of high modernist art cinema that is just as empty of narrative content in some cases. However, it might also act as an ironic aside to the audience, indicating the shoestring budget with which the film was made. Though the movie lampoons the piecemeal construction of big-budget films through a subplot in which a "prima donna" actor is hired away by a rival film crew, it also literally takes aim at cult films by having the "prima donna" actor assassinate the talking head leader of a Scientology-like cult, whose bald pate and thick frames bears a striking resemblance to

Soderbergh's own on- and off-camera image as director. Thus, the film presents interpretations of itself both with and against several competing norms of movie-viewing: the Hollywood studio production, the cult film, and modernist "high art" cinema.

These brief examples of self-parody across cultures and periods demonstrate the wide range of techniques by which the mode can be achieved. Nonetheless, one commonality of self-parody is that it frequently appropriates different genres, opposing and joining generic conventions. Through these cleavages and distortions of the conventions or norms by which a text may be read, self-parody produces plural ideological valences and multiple implied reader positions. Why this link between multiple implied readers and plural generic conventions at work in a text? Theoretically, as I employ them, the distinctions between these two concepts may converge. The critical construct of the implied reader is neither identical with any narratee nor any actual reader; it is also not synonymous with the "ideal reader" since this term suggests a univocal position of perfect competence, which the very concept of self-parody as I define it here does much to challenge. Rather, an implied reader is a set of norms, values, expectations, assumptions, conventions, and knowledge bases that one can infer is needed to make sense of the text. Self-parodies, though, highlight that they make more than one kind of sense. They have (at least) a "double capacity" to invite a range of interpretations, and—lest every text slip into the category of self-parody—they foreground this contestation of divergent viewpoints in the work itself. That is, the different interpretations self-parodies offer both *in* the work and *about* the work cannot be hierarchical or supplemental. Those who contrast naïve and sophisticated readers, for example, often privilege sophisticated views, regarding naïve responses as subsumed by them. Similarly, to understand different implied reader positions as supplementary is often to ultimately merge their viewpoints. Self-parodies, on the contrary, engage in seemingly

incommensurable discourses. To use the term discourses suggests that another way to talk about a set of expectations, conventions, values, and norms is by referring to genres as types of discourses, though this is not to indicate that the set of any genre's standards is stable: I am not reifying genre, but rather understanding genre as a somewhat variable collection of presuppositions, techniques, conventions, and know-how that a reader, whether implied or actual, brings to bear upon a work. In this way, to ascribe a genre to a text is largely the same thing as to claim that the implied reader of the text uses certain norms and expectations to function in the meaning-making process. A text's genre and a text's implied reader positions, then, have a mutually constitutive relationship.

There are, however, frameworks other than genre, narrowly understood, that implied readers may bring to bear upon a text, such as the historical period that a reader inhabits (Borges contrasts an Early Modern reader with a more contemporary reader of *Don Quixote* in "Pierre Menard," for example, and shows the opposed kinds of sense each reader finds in virtually the same work). Practically, of course, texts rarely inscribe the framework of future readers—since these tend to be unknown—though perhaps the Biblical book of *Revelation* might be an example of this type of self-parody, opposing the obscure sense the text has for present readers with the supposedly revealed knowledge of the text for millennial readers. Other types of frameworks that implied readers may inhabit could include such facets as their race, gender, class, culture, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, and exegetical persuasion (i.e., a New Critical versus a deconstructive reader). On the surface, these aspects of the implied reader do not seem related to genre. Yet, since all we have to go on when we attribute such aspects of identity to the implied reader is the text itself, such subject positions are simply a function of different systems of discourse—in other words, genre in its broadest sense. Fundamentally, to be able to make any

claims about the identity of the implied reader is to assume that systems of discourse are inscribed with various markers of the identities of those who routinely employ those discourses. After all, identities themselves are discursive.

The implied reader provides a conceptual mediation between narratees, which can be located in the words of the text, and actual readers, who are flesh-and-blood persons that can be located in reality (or, in the case of *historical* actual readers, who are to be inferred through archival evidence). Most narratological theory would claim that some higher-order implied reader—perhaps a "meta-implied reader"—can understand the text as a self-parody by recognizing the contrasting subject positions of all the other multiple implied readers in the text. But the implied reader, as I use the term here, is not the "hypothetical, ideal audience for whom the implied author constructs the text and who understands it perfectly," as James Phelan describes the concept (213). There can be no "perfect" understanding of a self-parody, even in theory. Rather, the work of recognizing a text as a self-parody falls upon actual readers, whose positions are always compromised and provisional. An actual reader shuttles back-and-forth between the incommensurable frameworks, critical lenses, ascriptions of genre, or subject positions of the different implied readers the actual reader has discovered in a given text. The actual reader of a self-parody must be "both in and out of the game," in Whitman's phrase, alive to dual (and often contradictory) interpretations of the text. There are gaps and blind spots in self-parodies: no matter which viewpoint is chosen, anomalies will remain and *aporias* proliferate. Yet, the logic of a self-parody is "both/and." It is both to acknowledge a self-parody's contending viewpoints and to see those viewpoints as justified in the terms of the text itself, rather than attempting to take sides or integrate them into each other.

Robert Phiddian, in his analysis of Swift's *Tale of a Tub*, describes a very similar phenomenon to self-parody, which he terms anarchic parody:

> What we come to realize as we attempt to decipher the parody and come up with remarkably discordant alternatives, is that the text has no centre, that authorship (the integrating impression of present, authoritative intention) is erased. This is in the nature of anarchic parody. The parodic process of quotation and erasure activates plural and contradictory narratives, which, in turn, imply plural narrators, and with them plural centres of authority. (96)

Phiddian claims that the various editors, writers, voices, scribes, and censors who appear to have created the palimpsest of the text undo the sense of a univocal author, and with it, any determinate meaning in the text. Phiddian's reading deconstructs authorial intention, a concept that relies on the communicative model of interpretation. My readings of self-parody, however, do not presume a communicative model: I am not attempting to find out what an author originally intended, but rather how the text affords the conditions by which various groups of readers make different senses of it. The author function itself is, in large part, the creation of a community of readers. By focusing on multiple implied readers rather than multiple implied authors, self-parody does not result in the paradox that authorial intention is controverted by the plurality of authorial centers in the text or the deconstructive tenant that authorial presence is dispersed into textual traces. Acknowledging the plurality of readers does not, of course, create a paradox. Self-parody is not simply anarchic; instead, it uncovers the power dynamics that take place in the negotiations, disjunctions, and similitudes among different centers of social and

interpretive norms. My concept of self-parody allows us to locate the distinct reader positions, and thereby the different norms and values, that mutually inform the culture of which the text is a part.

One persistent problem that occurs in my definition of self-parody is determining what interpretations of a work are "inscribed" in the work—that is, somehow intrinsic to it—and what interpretations are merely "imposed." Of course, almost all interpretational models share some version of this problem. In fact, an examination of self-parody may reveal new insights into this question. Interpretations are transformations enacted on a text, which, at the most basic level, convert patterns of graphemes into semantic content (written words are turned into meanings) or change one unit of semantic content into another (a rose is not simply a rose but a symbol for something else). Just which transformational moves are warranted, however, is determined by a larger context of norms: all interpretation takes place against a background of a social horizon, or within an interpretive community. Therefore, an interpretation is constructed from the conjunction between the marks in the text and the matrix of transformations that any given interpretive community will recognize as valid. In claiming that self-parodies have multiple implied reader positions, I am tacitly referring to the legitimation established by different communities or interpretative norms. Thus, any application of my seemingly formalist definition of self-parody requires reference to an actual and historical social context.

II. Contexts and Connections

The reordering and proliferation of genres as cultural formations over the course of Britain's long eighteenth century vividly demonstrates the ways that new classes of readers had to transform inherited structures—both social and literary—to give expression to

their viewpoints. Raymond Williams, for example, remarks that the process of developing new cultural formations can be perceived:

> in the emergence and incorporation of working-class writing, where the fundamental problem of emergence is clearly revealed, since the basis of incorporation, in such cases, is the effective predominance of received literary forms—an incorporation, so to say, which already conditions and limits the emergence. (124)

Thus, dominant and residual literary forms are still inscribed in emergent working-class writing, as they were in other emergent forms, since the available formal resources of literary production are co-opted and modified for new purposes. As Williams continues, "what matters in understanding emergent culture, as distinct from both dominant and residual, is that it is never only a matter of immediate practice; indeed, it depends crucially on finding new forms or adaptations of forms" (126). Yet, such emergent cultural products may not be seen as such if the reader gives precedence to the dominant and residual forms that continue to leave their impressions on the work. The juxtaposition of an oppositional ideological framework within a text that shares many of the same formal properties as the cultural products that it is trying to displace creates the radical ambivalence necessary for self-parody. It is no coincidence, then, that the texts I examine are often considered as inaugurating or ending some generic tradition: their liminal status allows them to occupy contending social spaces even as social spaces and communities undergo realignment. The status of occupying two (or more) spaces allows many self-parodies to speak to some audiences while speaking past others.

As genres changed over the long eighteenth century through the proliferation of print culture and the development of the public sphere, self-parody enabled texts to speak to, and oftentimes past, readers in a diversifying marketplace. Ellen Gardiner notes that, "as the century progresses, the literary market expands, and the number of literate people with literary ambitions swells, class, educational, professional, and especially gender traits increasingly become critical factors in authors' constructions of privatized readers of both sexes" (16). Aristocratic males could no longer arrogate to themselves the privilege of being the presumed or exclusive audience for literary texts. Newly empowered or increasingly literate segments of the population—including queer, female, and middle class identity groups—emerged as distinct segments of an expanded, yet more fragmented, reading and theatre-going public. Gardiner goes on to remark that "print culture typically associated readers of a particular gender, class, educational background, or profession with one sort of text or another" (17). Hence, self-parodies, by making the boundaries between such disparate genres of texts murkier, could often upset and problematize the hierarchical divisions demarcated by traditional discursive and normative authorities.

Self-parody afforded a mode for representing both the contradictions between, and the mutual imbrications of, residual Christian and feudal, dominant aristocratic, and emergent capitalist ideologies. Its use reveals the era's divergent political valences encoded within—and contested through—generic norms. The self-parodic moment in the development of various related genres allowed even seemingly conservative texts to form and give expression to the values of new, often marginalized, communities of readers. Though Barbara M. Benedict writes that "the role of the reader" changed over the course of the century "from that of a collaborative participant in forging literary culture to that of a passive recipient of commodified literature who

reads… to train his or her moral response" (6), I hope to show that at least some texts resisted this trend to turn the active reader into a passive consumer. While the formation of identities took place in part because of bureaucratic, scientific, and market pressures to codify demographics, self-parodies—in their unsettled and unsettling perspectives—frequently made use of these subject positions to challenge the very economic and social order that made such subcultures of identity possible.

The present study takes up the promising suggestion by narratologist Harry E. Shaw that developing a theory of multiple reader positions may help account for the different cultural forces at work in a text:

> Among its more general virtues, thinking in terms of a multiplicity of audience positions might be of assistance in registering the crucial fact that the ideological force of any work depends in part on how it articulates with a specific ideological context, one that is likely to involve dimensions of history, class, gender, and race. (219)

Texts shape readers and readers shape texts. Yet, crucial to understanding this dynamic process is the intervening historical imbrication of different ideological formations of identity, the available cultural concepts and generic conventions that predominate at any time, and the social norms that form the horizon in which the interaction between readers and texts takes place. This ideological context itself is not stable, as Shaw's reference to history intimates. Rather, this ideological context is also shaped by readers and texts, as readers and texts are shaped by it in turn. By taking all of these aspects into account, we gain a better understanding of the text; and,

by recognizing the disparity between multiple reader positions, we gain a better understanding of the culture in which the text operates.

The multiplicity of culture is due to factors other than history, though. Not only does the diachronic overlap between residual, dominant, and emergent forms produce a variety of interpretational centers in a text, the synchronic organization of society—better understood as both fractured and conjoined in manifold, co-reciprocal relations of power rather than a smoothly dichotomized hierarchy of oppressor and oppressed—may cause textual cruces. Foucault states that:

> …relationships of force that take shape and come into play in the machinery of production, in families, limited groups, and institutions, are the basis for wide-ranging effects of cleavage that run through the social body as a whole. These then form a general line of force that traverses the local oppositions and links them together; to be sure, they also bring about redistributions, realignments, homogenizations, serial arrangements, and convergences of the force relation. (94)

Self-parodies often reflect the cleavages in the social body and the convergences of oppositional power structures. It is my hope that by analyzing self-parodies, in fact, one can discover such permutations of force distributed along several dimensions and perceive the linkages of otherwise indiscernible micro-political spheres, which ramify their effects throughout a culture. By recognizing such relationships as ruptures, overlaps, metaleptic revisions, continuities, disjunctions, superimpositions, and points of intersection between the different constructions of characters, plots, and forms afforded by multiple implied readers in the texts I examine, I thereby

hope to get a purchase on the historical development of actual readers' and social actors' identities, communities, and reading practices.

Although I have divided the chapters that follow according to the reputed genre of the works they consider, this is a teasingly paradoxical gesture since one of my implicit claims is that the ascription of genre is relative to, and partly constitutive of, an interpretation of these texts. To read *Aureng-Zebe* as a heroic drama is largely to overlook the mock heroic elements in the play; to presume *The Vicar of Wakefield* is a sentimental novel customarily presupposes a limitation or exclusion of its satiric effects. Each of these texts is contaminated by several genres, and denominating the genre of the work proves to be a constructive act that forecloses certain possibilities while opening up other readings. Conversely, genres themselves are often impure.

Gothic novels, for example, emerged as a cleavage of romance and realist genres, which allowed a space for queer counter-narratives to operate beside and between—and often between the lines of—the patterns of those more established, hetero-normative novelistic types. Pastoral poetry, during a similar period, changed dramatically in terms of its subject matter, its tropes, and its underlying ideology: the seventeenth-century pastoral that celebrated the country estates of aristocrats was radically rewritten to accommodate a Romantic pastoral that affirmed the commons and the abject but nonetheless ennobled common man. I examine some pastorals caught uneasily in the middle of this transition, partaking of both traditions. In the theatre, the demise of heroic drama left an ambivalent role for the masculine lead characters in subsequent serious drama. Recognizing the conjunction (and schism) of hero and anti-hero in many such plays, I deem these texts "(mock) heroic drama," thereby creating a generic category by which otherwise disparate dramatic forms might be seen as portraying similar patterns. Analogously, many allegedly sentimental novels seem to lapse almost wholly into satire, even as they

challenge both satiric and sentimental understandings of human nature by emphasizing role-playing. Thus, self-parodies break down conventional generic binaries while, all the same, depending on their appropriation of the conventions of genres as traditionally understood.

The cultural concepts that shape the texts I investigate travel across generic categories, though my presentation of this interpenetration of different cultural concepts often remains implicit in my argument, given each chapter's focus on a distinct genre. My examination of Gothic novels, for instance, uncovers queer counter-narratives that challenge positivist laws and norms. A similar process takes place in many of the other texts I analyze. *The Village*, for instance, critiques representatives of authority such as the doctor, the preacher, and the judge, who each impose a self-interested discourse on the laboring classes. By contrast, the poem praises the queer figures of the old man who is surrounded by other people's children and the young aristocrat, Manners, who dies as a sailor in the navy. Similarly, Gay portrays his authorial persona in *The Shepherd's Week* as traversing the space between aristocratic patron and the rustic characters he depicts, speaking a language that cannot be uttered. In *The Beggar's Opera*, Macheath literally finagles his way out of the clutches of the law, with the link between laws that govern material transactions and marital transactions made explicit. Aureng-Zebe, too, struggles between different laws and loyalties as each is made to seem self-refuting until he discovers a loophole to slip through. Furthermore, the contradictions within the law cause the play's more exemplary characters to develop what might today be called "gender queer" identities while characters whose narratives describe cautionary tales take on self-defeating feminine or masculine extremes. Again, *The London Merchant* confronts the inequality inherent in a contractual legal and commercial system, illustrating characters whose expressions of sexuality escape the norms that an unfair economy imposes. Hume's essay "Of Moral Prejudices" portrays

conflicts between affective norms mainly regulated in homosocial contexts and contractual laws that can decouple the conjunction of affective and utilitarian bonds between otherwise hetero-normative relations. Part of Hume's puzzle between affective norms and contractual laws, then, seems to be that either side of the dilemma he presents results in a queer choice. Fielding's scenes of attempted rape in *Joseph Andrews* question the then-normative juridical categories that relied on retributive justice for damages enacted rather than the motives of the parties at fault. In this way, the novel establishes what might be seen as a queer space between rape and not-rape, moving the legal system to eventually change not only its definitions and practices but also the very procedural concepts by which it operates. Likewise, in *The Vicar of Wakefield*, all the characters of the novel meet in prison as if at a dramatic masque: the characters' release from prison relies on both their administration of multiple personas and the play of legal equivocations that join the parties in marriage even as such cruces disrupt the normative implications and assumptions underlying wedlock. Finally, in *The Excursion*, Maria manages to avoid the punishment of scandal and negotiate a marriage with her second love while Mr. Hammond masks his desires behind good will, literary judgment, and the propriety of old age even while "seducing" Maria. The protagonists rehearse and thereby ultimately reconfigure social norms—and the law of public opinion—to their own advantage.

Just as the queer challenges to normative law are found in nearly all the text I investigate, so, too, the concept of pastoral takes on broader resonances than just a poetic form. In fact, the displacement of Gothic novels into the Dark Ages creates a dystopian temporality to destabilize contemporaneous juridical structures much like pastoral's projections of a Golden Age comment on the fallen nature of modern politics. Moreover, many Gothics actually co-opt a quasi-pastoral topography, whether it is *Northanger Abbey*'s feudal castle far away from the town of Bath or

The Old English Baron's Scottish border-grounds—the move through space into a wilder country setting denotes a parallel move back in time. If pastoral poetry ruptured the tropes of pastoral that had been associated with the landed gentry, then Gothic's use of landscape is likewise anti-pastoral. Pastoral also informs *The Beggar's Opera*, which is frequently subtitled, after Swift's remarks, *A Newgate Pastoral*. What makes the play a pastoral is the elevation of a low figure—a highway robber, in this case, rather than a shepherd—into the symbolic guise of an aristocratic lord. Macheath more literally represents a "shepherd" wearing his mask of a Christological hero. Likewise, the other "(mock) heroic dramas" I investigate have a similar elevation of low—and/or denigration of high—characters that share the fundamental structure of pastoral. Additionally, many sentimental novels appear to set up a distinction between a satiric and hypocritical town and a pastoral country of authentic sociability; nonetheless, just as satire infuses sentimental responses in these novels, the mercantile values of the town are depicted as invading the country. Sentimental novels are a challenge to traditional pastoral, too, in how they portray the abnegated or compromised duties of their pastoral leaders, such as Abraham Adams or Dr. Primrose. The conditions that allowed such figures to govern their parishes began to fade, and so these characters appear ambiguously as both exemplary old-fashioned spiritual guides and beside-the-point antiquarians retreating into their own myopic, idealized versions of the past.

The plays I include in this study demonstrate cleavages in the representations of gender roles, especially masculinity, resulting from residual Christian ideals of humility and charity, still-dominant aristocratic models of "chivalric" gentlemen, and emerging mercantile conceptions such as industry and inner character. Texts in other genres display similar tensions. Pope's seeming denigration of Ambrose Philips's poems results as much from class as from classical prejudices: genuine labor is thought of as unmanly because ungentlemanly. The

imbrication of class and gender roles can be seen, as well, in *The Shepherd's Week*, albeit the pastoral ease of the low characters is ironically a consequence of their avoidance of work, which provides them with time to enjoy illicit activities. The shift in the figure of the pastoral shepherd directly parallels the turn in the paradigm of masculinity from a gentleman who has leisure into a laborer renowned for his work ethic. In the same vein, the aristocratic male figures in many Gothic novels find themselves either villainized or displaced by feminine and/or middle-class insurgents. Henry and General Tilney are replaced in Catherine's affections by Eleanor; Baron Fitz-Owen has his estate usurped by the coterie surrounding Edmund Twyford; and Manfred and Frederick have their claims to sovereignty overruled by Theodore, the women of the house, as well as the moonlight, which is a symbol of both chastity and lunacy. The characters in sentimental novels meanwhile show the conflict between models of manhood derived from Christian principles and the new ideas about manliness issuing from the commercial ethos: humble patriarchal fathers such as Abraham Adams and Dr. Primrose lose control over their broods. Lower- or middle-class figures such as Joseph Andrews and Maria Villiers prominently rise in class status while the etiolated, foppish or rakish squirearchy (Beau Didapper, Squire Thornhill) descend. In light of this newfound trajectory, Lord Melvile in *The Excursion* is a delightful paradox: at once obedient son and aristocratic playboy, he defies his initial impression as a coldblooded libertine when he begins cultivating an ironically romantic core. While partly a reformed rake, his triumph, such as it is, results from a marriage to a nouveau riche beauty that saves the ailing family estate from its debts, but also a concomitant adoption of just enough earnest and dutiful values to engender some middle-class readers' sympathy. Though other readers may wish he were more transgressive, his rejection of the heroine signals her dubious

moral status since it is situated against his own increasing acceptance of the bourgeois ethics she nominally professes.

My look at sentimental novels focuses on the interactions between sentimental, satiric, and dramatic modes of discourse. Nevertheless, the same interactions occur across nearly all the genres and texts I survey: showing the interplay of these discourses is one of the fundamental interventions of this study. When Pope's satire against Ambrose Philips slips into a performance of Philips's style, the performance undermines the satire such that the reader cannot easily condemn the outlandish dialect and low, trivial subject matter when the verse is possessed of such evident panache. Likewise, the satiric level of *The Shepherd's Week* was ignored by some contemporaneous readers in favor of a more sympathetic approach to the "realistic" low characters, demonstrating how satiric distancing or sentimental identification can depend on the values the reader brings to the text. *The Village* employs a tactic of bait-and-switch, addressing both laborers and peers, only to reject each by turns. Hence, Crabbe's poem collapses a clear distinction between his satiric targets and his sentimentalized audience. The camp of Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* reverses the usual displacement of sentiment by satire, and naïvete by sophistication, through offering the reader affective pleasures despite the readers' cognizant participation in a kind of hoax, farce, or melodrama. Austen's satire against Gothic novels in *Northanger Abbey* reveals a very deep connection to the genre. Even as Catherine rejects Gothic fantasy, she grafts the symbolic fears of Gothic onto more realistic events and characters: though General Tilney may not be a murderous monster, he nevertheless casts Catherine out of his house and into the scene of a coach where she had been previously threatened with rape. Similarly, the novel contrasts Catherine's assiduous fulfillment of her promises with Henry Tilney's at times asinine recitation of lines, both social and literary. *The Old English Baron*'s seemingly

sentimental hetero-normative love plot has a thoroughgoing ambiguity, which allows one to read it as the plot of a group of queer, lower-class male figures to take over an estate. Consequently, it can be interpreted as a satire against the very heteronormative, bourgeois values it ostensibly upholds. Likewise, *The Beggar's Opera* inverts the audience's sentimental investment in Macheath in order to expose him at the end as a cheat—in marriage and money alike, thereby a more proper object of ridicule. *Aureng-Zebe* controverts earnest depictions of its heroes and ultimately purely satiric ones, as well. Instead, the citational and performative nature of language is emphasized in Dryden's play, rendering any authority (even identity itself) suspect and precarious. Likewise, *The London Merchant*'s pieties are gainsaid by the satiric subtext of the play. The difference between a performance of one's duties and a mere performance as a false show evaporates the didactic sentiment the play putatively preaches. All these works operate on different registers while appealing to various readerships. Each text, in fact, highlights the ways that its divergent meanings are at cross-purposes; together, they thereby reveal the ideological transformations of the period.

III. Overview

Though this study's topic is self-parody, its particular focus on the long eighteenth century stems from the period's countervailing tendencies, which makes the era particularly fertile for manifestations of self-parody. On the one hand, the Enlightenment era witnessed the formation of legal positivism, mercantile capitalism, rationalist science, neoclassical poetics, and realist novels, all of which may have abetted the bureaucratic state to enforce compulsory legibility. On the other hand, however, the long eighteenth century was a time of rapid expansion in literacy and the rise of popular culture. Female, middle class, lower class, and queer identity

groups developed as distinct, and often powerful, segments within the public sphere. Alongside hegemonic discourses that sought to universalize a concept of rational "Man," many generic categories shifted and reorganized. Some newly developed or altered versions of genres became hybridized and capacious enough to incorporate the divergent values of their newly literate or empowered audiences. Texts that engaged in generic experimentation nonetheless inherited conventions from previous literary types, and were often inscribed with residual social norms. However, through such means as polysemy, metalepsis, performativity, radical ambiguity, and overlapping generic conventions, competing norms and values intersected in many texts of the period. My close readings of self-parodies uncover both the implied and actual reading practices employed by different sectors of a text's audiences that enabled it to express competing centers of interpretation. By recognizing diverse subject positions within texts, I demonstrate how texts articulate specific, historically conditioned ideological valences. I thereby hope to provide a more nuanced understanding of both texts and the broader eighteenth-century culture of which they formed a part.

Gothic novels arose as a hybrid of the older romance and the newer realist novel forms, an amalgamation which I contend facilitated the disruption of the patriarchal norms embedded in these other genres by introducing covert queer narratives that undo ostensibly hetero-normative love plots. My first chapter, "Queering Authority: The Emergence of the Gothic Novel," explores this thesis through an analysis of the work of Horace Walpole, Clara Reeve, and Jane Austen. *The Castle of Otranto*, in a juridical context divided between Roman law and English common law, inverts Blackstone's metaphor of a Gothic castle as a symbol of legal authority. The novel demonstrates how any source of authority depends on an intractable myth of origin, which may be reinterpreted, much as *Otranto*'s dual prefaces retroactively re-read the novel's

own genealogy. The legitimacy of different lineages, laws, and bodies in the novel become contested and subjected to doubling so that they jointly collapse upon their "spectral" foundations. I argue that Reeve's *The Old English Baron* continues Gothic's queer disruptions. While seeming to advance pious and meritocratic values, the novel is troubled by the murky legal grounds of duels, ambiguous bloodlines, disputed inheritances, and the illegibility of texts that underwrite established dispersions of power. Though the novel passes for a realistic romance in which property rights are transferred through marriages, my reading of it reveals that its lower-class male characters engage in secret alliances to pass themselves off as entitled through accounts that parody marriage. Likewise, *Northanger Abbey* juxtaposes various generic scripts—and the gendered assumptions inscribed in them—to skew its conventionality while nonetheless showing that conventions are necessary to engage readers or partners. Catherine and Henry perform both their social contracts and self-conscious novelistic roles while deviating from them in queer and quixotic ways, just as the narrative itself replaces sinister fantasies with realistic if more insidious threats of patriarchal violence, thereby invalidating the very scripts the novel fulfills. The inevitability of the novel's romance ending is implicitly undermined by Eleanor's last-minute suitor, an otherwise extraneous character with secrets in his closet. In this way, Gothic conventions are parodied even as they are re-absorbed into the discourse of the realist novel. In a time of increasing legal legibility, Gothic stressed the gray areas of queer counter-law.

My second chapter, "Pastoral, Pastiche, and the Neoclassical Impasse," explores the relationship of eighteenth-century pastoral to this concept of self-parody. Pastoral poetry underwent a transformation in this period from a celebration of idealized aristocratic ownership of the country—both as exurban land and as nation—into a nascent critique of industrial

exploitation; many pastorals display a tension between these competing attitudes and a bifurcation in the audiences they address. In *The Guardian,* No. 40, Alexander Pope uses a satiric attack upon the *Pastorals* of Ambrose Philips to ultimately disown pastoral altogether for its uncouth country matters and outlandish (as opposed to urbane) dialect. I claim that Pope's essay nonetheless creates a mock-pastoral that embraces the genre's lowest elements. Issuing from the Pope-Philips controversy, John Gay's *Shepherd's Week* challenges the high-minded vacuity of classical set-pieces at the same time that its allusive form obeys canonical precedents; it pokes fun at the trivial and dirty nature of peasants while simultaneously celebrating their vitality and economic labor. Gay renders any reader's subject position unstable by the breadth of his intertextual references, ranging from ballads to the Bible, and the contradictory values that underlie these different traditions. Similarly, George Crabbe's *The Village* points out the poverty of aristocratic pastoral discourse in order to expose the real poverty of the populace in the countryside. Yet, by employing the tropes of pastoral that it criticizes as outworn, the poem's shifting address both identifies with and critiques its various audiences. Previous pastoral traditions mask figures of authority in shepherd's clothing; these texts often rupture their figurations to reveal those authorities' corruption.

In chapter three, "Mock Heroic Drama and Competing Concepts of Masculinity," I maintain that the signal shift in serious plays in the long eighteenth century from heroic to bourgeois drama displays the failures of chivalric, imperialist ideals alongside an uneasy rehabilitation of those same ideals to aggrandize mercantile and lower-class protagonists. Masculinity is accordingly troubled as competing representations of gender both fuse and pull apart. In John Dryden's *Aureng-Zebe*, the constant plot reversals, ambiguous characters, shifting affective registers, and transposition of genres represent a world wherein the competing powers

of love and sovereignty are grounded only by language, the citational quality of which threatens to undermine all authority. Dryden's heroic drama shows a self-divided audience and masculinity in crisis. Also compromised, Macheath in John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* superimposes the male archetypes of a tragic Christological hero, an aristocratic rake, and a mercantile captain of industry. These paradigms create generic rifts within the opera, which resolve with the farcically "happy" ending demonstrating that the double-dealing audience has ironically championed a rogue. The self-parodic ending not only allows Macheath to escape Christian martyrdom and a regulated (albeit black) market economy, it also inverts his chivalric role as a knight into that of a Turk with a harem. Similarly, the uneasy mix of Christian, mercantile, and libertine ideals in George Lillo's *The London Merchant* undoes the play's didactic import: the "honesty" of merchants and lovers appears suspect. Millwood, seemingly the villain, nevertheless gives voice to the injustices of an economy that enforces compulsory legibility; Barnwell, the hero, has his conversion rendered ambivalent by the queer relationships he forms. Generic mergers and gaps within such plays expose the contradictions of gender expression in a society moving from feudal to capitalist structures.

Lastly, I study the sentimental novel in my chapter "Affect and Affectation: Economies of Performance in Sentimental Novels." My research shows that many sentimental novels appealed to a broad audience by portraying different systems of morality, which reciprocally subvert each other, and depend as much on satire as on readers' sentimental identification with characters. Providing philosophical context, David Hume's essay "On Moral Prejudice" views sentiment as both a norm and a bias, depicting potential conflicts between changing affective standards and rigidifying contractual obligations. Sentimental novels show how moral norms were negotiated amidst diversifying and increasingly secular readerships. Within this

atmosphere, the division of Henry Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* into a narrative grid of sections has the self-parodic effect of dividing its middle-class audience. The onus of reconstituting the novel's significance requires readers to wrestle with their fidelity to the text and question the charity of their interpretations. The interpolated tales disrupt both the closure and moral order of the larger narrative, and the reader is impelled to resist the overbearing narrator; similarly, the novel's slapstick symbolically punishes the protagonists, simultaneously presenting them as both moral exemplars and transgressors. In this same tradition, Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield*, I argue, depicts a dramatic concept of the self, challenging both satiric and sentimental readings. *The Vicar* offers what I term a "radically" unreliable narrator: the reader is not offered stable values by which to judge the narrator's veracity. Readers must supplement the text with values even as the text interrogates various moral assumptions. In an analogous process of questioning readers' assumptions, Maria in Frances Brooke's *The Excursion* increasingly performs the innocence she is in the process of losing. She learns to control the circulation of gossip, much like the ironic narrator, so as to advance her social position. Sentimental novels reflect a fracturing society. Satiric policing and sentimental identification are in fact two sides of the same process of reconfiguring communities with shared norms, though the possibility of social cohesion in such novels is often portrayed as unlikely. In fact, these novels reveal a developing notion of social performance, which challenges the surface/depth distinction that underpins both satiric and sentimental understandings of human nature.

Britain's long eighteenth century was a time of tremendous flux, as residual feudal and Christian ideals gave way to an emerging system of values adjudicated foremost by the early capitalist marketplace. I demonstrate the importance of the operation of diverse actors within that marketplace, sometimes by covert or insidious means. By analyzing the interpretational

strategies that newly-formed readerships used to build communities, I show how these communities had a vital bearing on social and political changes. The ideological production of discourses in the long eighteenth century, especially transitional generic discourses, both reflect and help create emergent readerships. My emphasis on texts as sites of contention, as well as mergers, among these different discourses reveals the cultural reorganization that altered the ways that identities and social groups were constructed over the eighteenth century and which continue to produce repercussions in present day legal, political, social, sexual, aesthetic categories. Indeed, the tensions and antagonisms we have inherited from the Enlightenment era directly impinge on many of the problematic issues of law, morality, affect, sexuality, class division, gender roles, performance, and interpretation in today's pluralistic, neoliberal Western societies.

Chapter One

Queering Authority: the Emergence of the Gothic Novel

> What if there were, lodged within the heart of the law itself, a law of impurity or a principle of contamination? And suppose the condition for the possibility of the law were the a priori of a counter-law, an axiom of impossibility that would confound its sense, order, reason?
>
> —Jacques Derrida, "The Law of Genre"

Gothic fiction self-consciously begins as a double, a cleavage, inhabiting the liminal and overlapping space between anachronistic romance and modern novels. Gothic's first two incarnations, Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* and Clara Reeve's *The Old English Baron*, likewise double each other, using a similar plot structure to enact different registers of resistance to the normative requirements of novelistic narrative. Moreover, each of these works also doubles itself in that both of them contain two prefaces, each of which contradicts and reframes the relationship of text to reader, as well, perhaps, as eliding the distinction between paratext and text. And, of course, both of these works inaugurate the Gothic's most persistently troubling trope of the double: the characters encounter various doppelgängers, have their identities repeatedly mistaken, and pass themselves off with aliases within the funhouse of these errant plots.

Within such Gothic structures, readers and characters alike are figuratively married to their others, marred by their shadows, or mirrored in simulacra of their own psyches. Moreover,

the plots often double back, replaying similar scenes with a different cast of characters or in a different affective register. As this proliferation of doubling is meant to suggest, even as Gothic fiction emerges as a genre in its own right, it calls the stability of the basic categories of genre, plot, character, and text into question.

By the 1790s, Gothic fiction had come to dominate the marketplace. Robert Miles writes that "Radcliffe was the best-selling novelist of the 1790s, earning copyright fees several times those of her nearest competitors; her imitators filled the bookshops so that the Gothic romance accounted for a third of novels sold" (10). Without making too fine a point about how to distinguish what should and what should not count as a "Gothic romance," it is clear that a new phenomenon in literary tastes had been ushered in, and readers clamored for these strange and titillating tales of love and horror. The constellation of conventions in this newly formed genre (mostly) fulfilled traditional courtship plots while, at the same time, disrupting or problematizing many of the domesticated and hetero-normative assumptions that such plots often inscribed. The writers of eighteenth-century British Gothic fiction were, with few exceptions, women and queer men such as Walpole, Beckford, Lewis, and Lathom—whether "notoriously" or "iffily" homosexual, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick quips (92). The monsters, monks, and madmen that populate Gothic fiction are often encoded criticisms of the patriarchal strictures placed on men and women to obey heterosexual norms, which abet the economic status quo through systems of wedlock and inheritance, despite most of the novels' seeming containment of orderly structures of marriage inheritance. The popularity of Gothic novels among a wide audience indicates that such queer codes were indirect, sidelong and surreptitious, so that Gothic fiction created a double readership, as well. The multiple implied readers in Gothic novels may have corresponded to a split in groups of actual readers or, more likely, they split the psyche of the same actual reader.

In order to appeal to conservative notions of propriety at the same time that they critiqued them—dual concerns shared by many actual readers simultaneously—Gothic novels themselves bifurcate, offering distinctly layered or lateral interpretations, both displaying and downplaying their excess, burying their subversion within a surface of narrative rectitude and erecting shibboleths by which their queer interventions may pass by more unsuspecting readers. Nonetheless, Gothic texts hint at the counter-narratives they contain by addressing and performing secrets, silences, and clandestine spaces. William Hughes and Andrew Smith have stated:

> Gothic has, in a sense, always been 'queer'… [It] tends to mobilise unpalatable if not actually taboo issues—such as sexual deviance, arbitrary power, miscegenation, and apostasy—even where a fearful publishing industry demands that these troubling things should be contained by the eventual triumph of a familiar morality. (1)

Lip service is often paid to patriarchal moral norms within the Gothic tradition even as it subsequently spawns bloodsucking vamps, rabid monsters, and drag-queen gypsies hidden in various chests, cases, and closets. Likewise, the Gothic has always inhabited a slippery domain between the tragic and comic, the sublime and the ridiculous, calling on its readerships to engage the text with mixed affects or superimposing both tonal registers in the very same scene. The self-parody underwritten by the overwrought Gothics of the 1790s became explicitly metafictional with Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, which dramatizes the diverse readerships and reception of this emerging genre. In *Northanger*, though the realistic hetero-normative courtship narrative that ends in marriage may appear to contain the quixotic forces of the novel's

Gothic interlude, recent criticism has unlocked the queer insinuations that leak out from the work's fantasmatic center. The various characters engage in dialogues about the proper relationship to reading, especially in regard to Gothic novels, even as the narrator calls upon the reader of this novel to take opposing or ironic viewpoints toward the work. *Northanger Abbey*, in fact, doubles itself so successfully that some do not regard it as a Gothic at all, but rather as a realistic novel that parodies the Gothic. But the reflexivity of its parody highlights the ways that the critique of gender and the discussions of genre apply to the novel's own deviant discourse, as well.

The deviance of Gothic, in many cases, acts to skew—and skewer—the Enlightenment's increasingly positivist discipline of law, inheritance, contracts, documentation, and penal procedures. Digressions, doubling, code switching, pastiche of generic conventions, puns, framing devices, paratexts, ambiguous address, lacunae, meta-reference, repetitions, messy borders, fantastic figures, and dream worlds—these are some of the many techniques that Gothic fiction utilizes to upend and endlessly delay any sense of a text's self-evidential truth. Like the later genre of science fiction, which arose in the nineteenth century from utopian literature as it looked toward an imaginary future to re-envision solutions for current political dilemmas and technological anxieties, the genre of Gothic emerged in the eighteenth century by creating a fictitious past in which to act out contemporaneous legal impasses in a setting removed from the all-too-real censorious pressures that it sought to critique.

In an atmosphere in which the sanction of law enforced hetero-normative familial structures through contractual arrangements so that consent was exchanged among propertied straight men even where the fate of women (and confirmed bachelors) was most concerned, Gothic fiction can be read as an extended, though coded, deconstruction of the assumptions

undergirding the overbearingly patriarchal legal system. With increasingly widespread literacy among women and the formation of a public sphere that developed a tacit recognition of a homosexual subculture, if only to suppress it, Gothic empowered marginalized groups to challenge and queer authority. In this regard, Markman Ellis notes the power of one of the abiding tropes of Gothic, the castle:

> The medieval castle, in particular, offered a potent symbolism, diverse and fully exploitable, to political theorists as much as Gothic novelists. The castle could represent the site of the monarchy's power, but it could also figure within a more popular tradition as a place of refuge, where the entire community found protection and succor…. The symbolic association of the castle with political power and established authority was re-appropriated in many contexts, including the Gothic novel, where it could also serve as an image of the oppressive restraint of the old order on modern innovations and change. (26-27)

Gothic novelists, beginning with Walpole and Reeve, invert the figure that conservative historians and jurists such as Burke and Blackstone use to justify sovereign power by linking it to a venerable, though quasi-mythic, feudal past. Nevertheless, the polyvalent figure of the castle—like much else in Gothic—can be read in terms of many competing ideologies so that it is amenable to congenial interpretations by different audiences.

By co-opting conservative figures and rhetoric, as well as traditional plots that end in marriages and restoration of estates, for ends that challenged the patriarchy, Gothic gives the lie to a compulsory legibility that had resulted in the dissemination of a wide-spread classification

system and penal code linked to physiognomy that helped enforce authority over the course of the eighteenth century. In his still influential study *The Rise of the Novel*, Ian Watt argues that early realist novelists such as Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding depended on a scientific epistemology which held that our senses give us an accurate report of the external world; that knowledge could be gained through taxonomic divisions and measurements; and that a greater clarity of language emphasizing particulars would yield the truth. In the context of these key tenets, Gothic literature can be understood to appropriate the form of the realist novel in order to turn these assumptions on their heads. In Gothic novels, the senses often delude characters or readers with nightmares, daydreams, and projections of desires mimicked from books or fashion; any absolute metric that purports to quantify size or power becomes subject to dismorphic enlargement or shrinkage, reversals, or over-ruling; and language itself is serpentine and oozing—wormholed and doubling back, wobbly and darkening; it is as filled with back entrances and trapdoors as the ruptured architectural palimpsest that its characters navigate.

Though the law itself was undergoing changes, adopting a more rational and scientific rhetoric, the readership of literature was diversifying, so that authors could appeal to audiences outside the republic of letter's coterie of propertied males. Whereas Blackstone's codification of English Common Law, for example, attempted to transform that tangled and mythic code into a juridical "science," Gothic novels, by contrast, often demonstrated how instances of seemingly positivistic structures of law and order are actually entangled with a mythic as well as a historical past. Gothic shows how even the most self-evident facts have been imbricated with fantasy. Thus, by dramatizing the competing power dynamics adapted by different constituencies, especially those who were disempowered by the growth of positivistic discourses, Gothic depicted how critical action can take place in the shadowy grey areas where genres, readerships,

or legal sovereignties may overlap. Gothic novels are allegories by which readers negotiate a counter-law that allows them to abide and yet abandon the legible strictures and the structural legal codes of the patriarchy. Against those critics who would locate a queer turn in Gothic in the nineteenth or twentieth centuries, we can see that from its inception with Walpole and Reeve Gothic has always been forked and athwart. Never afraid to gets its hands dirty, the Gothic has been eager to show the grease on the law's palm and the tarnished residue of its iron fist.

Ghostwriting the Laws: Specters of Authority in *The Castle of Otranto*

In *The Castle of Otranto*, the repeated plot twists act as potential turnings in the sources of authority, as each revelation of domestic identity threatens to cause a political revolution. The multiple social roles that the characters inhabit commit them to tortuous (if not torturous) double-binds. The shifting zone of the castle is marked by, and ultimately succumbs to, the burden of laws that over-determine its fate, symbolized by Alfonso's ghost. The novel foreshadows the downfall of the house, and the larger political structures the house represents, through the ghastly superimposition of various "laws," which come into conflict: laws of chivalry, hospitality, primogeniture, love, church, nature, reason, and parental prerogative. An appeal to each of these sources of authority is made—when it is most convenient for a character in any given situation. The specter that haunts the castle's matrix of authority extends beyond the narrative itself, however, to include its paratextual apparatus and a division within the novel's readerships, marking a division in the law of genre, which potentially queers its readership and helps to reevaluate the normative expectations that govern its own discourse through self-parody.

I. Blackstone: English Law as a Gothic Castle

Contextually, it is worth noting that the English legal system was divided during the time Walpole wrote the novel. Matthew Mauger writes:

> The life of the law in England in the mid-eighteenth century was… mediated through a tension between two legal systems, which offered competing claims to a pure legal history of origins. The Roman law, codified in an ancient, classical document which claimed to embody the most perfect legal system the world had ever known, the subject of academic study; and the native English common law, the practised law, which was not written down, which claimed a vast heritage via customs reaching back beyond living memory, beyond print culture, into the mythic history of the ancient kings of Britain and their supposed ancestry from the exiled Trojans. (166)

While the academic ideal of legal discourse remained written Roman law, the law that was practiced referred to the unwritten English common law, embodied in precedent but the origins of which were lost in a mythic pre-history. In the 1760s, contemporaneous with Walpole's publications of *Otranto*, Blackstone's *Commentaries* attempted to codify the common law into a "science," as Mauger points out, in the tradition of "rational exposition" (166). This tension in the law between classical and folk traditions mirrors Walpole's own amalgamation of the neoclassical form of a five-act tragedy with the Gothic romance tradition with its miracles and digressions. Whereas Walpole highlights the uneasy admixture of different generic genealogies that make up his work, introducing miracles and outlandish fictions into a classical structure,

Blackstone's project is to rationalize the tangled nexus of English common law, papering over the incongruities, myths, and gaps within that tradition's long, unwieldy history.

Indeed, Blackstone's *Commentaries* provide the figure of the English law as a Gothic castle, and it will be worthwhile to quote Blackstone at some length since these passages touch upon many of the fundamental problems in the structure of the law that Walpole's text deconstructs:

> We have now gone through the whole circle of civil injuries, and the redress which the laws of England have anxiously provided for each. In which the student cannot but observe that the main difficulty which attends their discussion arises from their great variety, which is apt at our first acquaintance to breed a confusion of ideas, and a kind of distraction in the memory: a difficulty not a little increased by the very immethodical arrangement in which they are delivered to us by our antient writers, and the numerous terms of art in which the language of our ancestors has obscured them. (3: 265)

Blackstone admits to a "circle" of injuries, as if the revenge of one injury leads to another; or, as if one were lost in a circuitous maze of increasing pain that went round in time. He also here confesses that the obscurity of language in which the law itself has been written may "breed confusion," and, furthermore, he gestures at the "immethodical" variety of the legal system, in which one claim or authority can provide a "distraction" from another. All these themes, of course, appear in *Otranto*.

Blackstone, shortly thereafter, attempts to justify the use of legal fictions as a means to remediate the rights of real property:

> And since, in order to obviate those difficulties and retrench those delays, we have permitted the rights of real property to be drawn into question in mixed or personal suits, we are (it must be owned) obliged to have recourse to such arbitrary fictions and expedients, that unless we had developed their principles, and traced out their progress and history, our present system of remedial jurisprudence (in respect of landed property) would appear the most intricate and unnatural that ever was adopted by a free and enlightened people. But this intricacy of our legal process will be found, when attentively considered, to be one of those troublesome, but not dangerous, evils, which have their root in the frame of our constitution, and which therefore can never be cured without hazarding every thing that is dear to us. In absolute governments, when new arrangements of property and a gradual change of manners have destroyed the original ideas on which the laws were devised and established, the prince by his edict may promulge a new code, more suited to the present emergencies. But when laws are to be framed by popular assemblies, even of the representative kind, it is too herculean a task to begin the work of legislation afresh, and extract a new system from the discordant opinions of more than five hundred counsellors. A single legislator or an enterprising sovereign… may at any time form a concise, and perhaps a uniform, plan of justice: and evil betide that presumptuous subject who questions its wisdom or utility. (3: 267-268)

Blackstone offers an apologia for the "arbitrary fictions and expedients" that are inextricably entangled in the legal system, which he himself deems may look like the "most intricate and unnatural adopted by a free and enlightened people." But Blackstone's justification of these

seemingly "troublesome" stopgap measures and fictional expedients is based on an absolute sovereign intervening to correct the old law with new codes. The act of rectifying the law takes place in a state of emergency in which the king can suspend or replace the system of old laws with novel ones he has devised himself, with Blackstone ruling out any representative or democratic input. He also adds, ominously, "evil betide the presumptuous subject who questions" these edicts, seeming not to recognize the dangers of an arbitrary and corrupted absolute monarch that contravenes or overturns the whole developed system of law, thus making a mockery of it. That is, Blackstone does not foresee the possibility of a tyrant like Manfred becoming the absolute sovereign. As Benjamin Bird points out, Manfred's tyrannical edicts may be modeled on a source that hits home since "Walpole composed the novella during a fit of intense disillusionment with what he perceived to be George III's excessive use of the royal prerogative" (193). In addition, Blackstone considers the questioning of the sovereign an "evil" that far outweighs the admitted "evil" of the intricacy of the legal process. Blackstone's dilemma—exacerbated and made more explicit by Walpole's fiction—appears to be that the law is either ultimately arbitrary, stopping with the king's capricious decree, or its imbricated processes of interpretation could go on endlessly, exhausting the human purposes which it supposedly arbitrates. This dilemma is the nightmare of *Otranto*.

Blackstone continues in this passage to defend the palimpsest of legal precedent, in which new points are written over without necessarily over-riding older clauses, though the latter may fall into disuse and obliquity. He says that "new expedients" can better "answer the purpose of doing speedy and substantial justice" than "any great fundamental alterations" (3: 268). He then introduces the figure of the law as a Gothic castle:

> The only difficulty that attends them [the new expedients] arises from their fictions and circuities: but, when once we have discovered the proper clew, that labyrinth is easily pervaded. Our system of remedial law resembles an old Gothic castle, erected in the days of chivalry, but fitted up for a modern inhabitant. The moated ramparts, the embattled towers, and the trophied halls, are magnificent and venerable, but useless, and therefore neglected. The inferior apartments, now accommodated to daily use, are cheerful and commodious, though their approaches may be winding and difficult. (3: 268)

Blackstone admits the law is a "labyrinth," and never offers the clue by which he reassures his readers it may be navigated. His depiction of the inheritance of chivalric codes and conventions in the law as trophied halls or neglected towers of a castle presents the castle—and the legal code its represents—as a quaint relic of a durable edifice, though Walpole will transform this same metaphor into the dreary dungeons and dark passageways of a crumbling habitation to show how authority is haunted and undone by the specters of its feudal past. Likewise, Blackstone appears to contradict himself when he calls the "inferior" parts of the castle both "cheerful" and "winding and difficult." Walpole, instead, emphasizes the tortuous and intractable nature of pervading the eighteenth-century English legal system, much as living in an old Gothic castle could be drafty and dank. He exposes and explodes both the law and its metaphor of a castle for their shifting foundations upon which too much weighty matter has been placed.

Sue Chaplin points out how Blackstone's text claims its status merely as a commentary on a prior legal text, thereby sponsoring a fictional myth of origin since the prior text to which it refers had not (yet) been written: Blackstone subsequently "was read *as* law and was cited thereafter as a powerful legal precedent" (*The Gothic and the Rule of Law*, 45). Blackstone relies

on the authority of a "spectral" ancient law, pretending to codify a legal system that he, in fact, creates. Chaplin goes on to claim that *Otranto* challenges Blackstone and the notion of law as a self-present and positivistic discourse, and more specifically as synonymous with the patriarchal Logos, by "foregrounding the problematics of juridical subjectivity so as to interrogate the deeply ambivalent subject positions" of each of the major characters ("Spectres of Law," 178). The "ruling principle" of legal power is "ultimately no more 'legitimate' than Manfred's own abject ursupation of power" since the "Law-as-Logos exists… as no more than a spectral assemblage of signs circulating independently of the system of power which it is supposed to authenticate" (ibid). While I largely agree with Chaplin's thesis and wish to extend it even further, her methodology leaves much to be desired. Instead of examining the text of *Otranto* closely, she is more intent on performing an allegoresis in which Walpole's text merely exemplifies a variety of truths already furnished by recent critical theory. After lengthy paraphrases of theorists such as Legendre, Kristeva, and Žižek, Chaplin then says "this is the lesson learned by Manfred," ("Spectres of Law," 182) elucidating little in the novel before she goes on to rehearse another set of deconstructionist tenets, which reduces the import of the eighteenth-century text to her summary of the latest philosophers or political theorists. Such approaches, commonly of a deconstructive or psychoanalytic stripe, promise much, but ultimately fail to do justice to the complexity of either the theoretical or the literary texts under consideration.

Not only does *Otranto* undermine the legitimacy of legal discourse, it also shows all forms of normative authority to be compromised and contaminated by a dependence on some prior source of authority, so that authority itself can have no authorized origin. Unlike Chaplin who examines an abstracted notion of Law-as-Logos, derived from twentieth-century critical

theory, I argue that there are several types of law or authority depicted in *Otranto.* These competing and overlapping sources of sovereign power in the novel collapse in upon one another, much like the castle itself. The structure of law in its different varieties is shown to be filled with loopholes and dark passages, lacunae and indecipherable signs, which foreground the notion that the authority of the law, far from being self-present, is jerrybuilt from interpretive wishful thinking and the willful denial of its many contradictions.

II. Competing Sources of Authority within *Otranto*

Within the novel, each major male figure has multiple claims to the sovereignty of Otranto. Manfred, of course, is the current Lord: he not only holds the title, but further justifies his rights through sheer power—deemed the "law of arms" (43)—and by paying lip service to acting for the good of the people, both of which justifications prove specious. He admits that his ancestor, Ricardo, was not of noble descent. Manfred's story is that Alfonso, since he had no heirs, bequeathed the estate of Otranto to Manfred's grandfather Ricardo, a trusty servant. Later, it is revealed that Ricardo poisoned Alfonso and "a fictitious will declared Ricardo his heir" (90). Thus, a shady fiction, subject to belated revision, holds together Manfred's stewardship of the state.

Jerome, the priest, can claim sovereignty through his position as mediator for the Church: if kings are designated by divine will, then Jerome represents and interprets that ghostly authority. Jerome also confesses to being the displaced Count of Falconara, and so possesses an authentic noble bloodline despite his ostensible guise as a clergyman. Also, ironically for a priest, he is the only one who is father of a living male heir. Jerome, however, is caught in the

contradictions of his roles as both a biological father and a religious Father, a nobleman and a priest.

Frederic can claim to rule Otranto even as a stranger in the castle through the "laws of hospitality and chivalry," which designate that a guest and his retinue are "masters under [the] roof" (47). Frederic's knights also wave a banner with "the arms of Vincenza and Otranto, quarterly," (45), implying that Frederic appeals to some lineage designating him as Otranto's ruler, though the details of this genealogy remain unspecified. The names Manfred and Frederic themselves curiously overlap, their remainders suggesting "manic" or "mannered," apt descriptions for the novel's claustrophobic yet elaborately comic style. Despite the claim to a joint heritage, Frederic attempts to broker a deal with Manfred to exchange their daughters in matrimony to each other—if Manfred cannot produce a male heir and Frederic can, then Frederic would be the legitimate ruler who unites the claims of the two houses. Frederic's coat-of-arms, then, may represent not claims of his past lineage, but rather the ligatures of his future hopes. In any event, Frederic's more immediate claims to rule Otranto appear symbolically bound up with a dream that directed him to a saintly hermit who, on his deathbed, revealed the giant sword that his men subsequently march into the castle. However, if bearing the sword represents authority, Frederic's claim to that authority collapses as his hundred men cannot support the enormous weight of the sword, similar to the way Manfred's initial hopes of orderly succession were crushed when his son Conrad died underneath the giant helmet.

Theodore, who ultimately gains a semblance of sovereign authority at the novel's end, though the castle itself implodes, does not have uncontested claims to being "the true prince of Otranto" (90), regardless of the narrative's gesture toward closure. Manfred, in fact, resigns the kingdom in grief and madness before he has any evidence whatsoever that Theodore is the heir

of Alfonso. Immediately after Manfred gives up the title, Jerome still refers to him as "your *Lordship*," which Manfred responds is "more than an outcast can claim" (91). Such asides demonstrate that if the title is difficult to usurp it is likewise difficult to renounce. Jerome recounts that although Alfonso married Victoria, he never "acknowledge[d] her for his lawful wife," since it was "incongruous with his holy vow of arms" (ibid). The legitimacy of such a private marriage, therefore, can easily be questioned. When Jerome offers what he only calls an "authentic writing," Manfred dismisses the proof, perhaps remembering from his grandfather's falsified will how documents can be fabricated or forged. Hippolita ironically tells Manfred to "be composed," as if he himself were a misbegotten will. Moreover, the authenticity of any writing is compromised on a metafictional level by the second preface, which undermines the novel itself as an authentic medieval document; the reader can discern that if *Otranto* itself had been forged, then the will to Otranto could easily be a fake, as well.

Further issues of illegitimacy within the novel trouble any legible, monolithic hierarchy of authority or lineage that confers sovereign power. The issue of Alfonso's purported wife is a daughter, who eventually marries Jerome and later gives birth to Theodore, at least according to the story told by Jerome. On the one hand, the descent through a female heir violates the patrilineal framework upon which most of the book is based. On the other hand, Jerome's marriage is also problematic given his role as a priest. The whole story of Theodore's origin has "secretly remained locked in [Jerome's] breast," (92) leading a skeptical reader to wonder if Jerome is not simply concocting the tale in order to validate his—possibly illegitimate—son's claim to the kingdom. As if these doubts were not enough, Theodore's marriage to Isabella, which appears to unite Theodore's claims with Frederic's to the estate, results rather in a further muddle. Isabella is offered not only by Frederic, but urged on Theodore by Hippolita, as if

Hippolita were her surrogate, holy mother; Theodore only agrees to marry Isabella to share his grief over Matilda, as if thereby joining the spirit of Matilda in wedlock. In the end, Theodore gains his position through means that are both symbolically overdetermined and evidentially underscrutinized. More simply, these complications demonstrate that patrilineal structures of authority are potentially sent-up and haunted by the basic question of "who's the daddy?" Because patriarchs themselves can never answer this question, institutions such as marriage, inheritance, and legal guardianship supplant simple filiation; yet, as *Otranto* demonstrates, sutures within or between such institutions—the rift between church and state, for instance, or within different ideas of fatherhood—threaten to undo the legitimacy of patriarchal authorities.

Although the resolution of the novel depicts the conflicting legacies of Otranto united by Theodore's marriage to Isabella as they jointly grieve for Matilda, the giant form of Alfonso has just previously reared up, bursting the walls and leaving the house in ruins (90). The myth of aristocratic legitimacy, and of a coherent and unequivocal law, has already been exploded, so that little is left for any potential heir to claim. In fact, the fall of the house directly results from the unification of Alfonso's body: the two dominant metonymical analogues for familial prerogative, aristocratic house and ancestral body, are put in incommensurable opposition, the joining of one leading to the downfall of the other. Similarly, the fragments of armor, outsized relics of outmoded feudal rights, become self-defeating in the context of the castle besieged from within. The helmet not only crushes Conrad, but later becomes a prison for Theodore. Relegating Theodore to the casque, then, ironically ensconces him inside the crown, foreshadowing his eventual position as head of the estate even as this role is depicted as imprisoning if not deadly. While the weight of the casque breaks the floor and allows Theodore to escape, it is only liberating to the extent that it is destructive of the house.

Whereas Conrad's sickly frame cannot bear the weight of kingship placed on his shoulders, Theodore's enforced residence inside the helmet suggest he is a homunculus, a ghost in the machine of the body politic. The depiction of the grandiose suit of armor not only emblematizes a satire of masculine hubris, the inflated dimensions of Alfonso's armature causing his estate's diminishment, but also evokes a parody of Hobbesian materialism, with its picture of a monarchical giant composed of various smaller bodies. The social contract designating a sovereign has been undone, mutilated and scattered by multiple considerations, resulting again in a condition of war of everyone against every one. The picture of the state as a collective body (the commonwealth as an artificial man) is turned by Walpole into an image of fragments of empty armor animated by a disembodied ghost. Sovereign power floats free, a mere apparition, while the various would-be rulers attempt to enact their all-too-carnal desires. Legal positivism is burlesqued in an epistemological nightmare: all signs and contracts are rendered ambiguous or indecipherable. The symbols of sovereignty—the casque, the sword, the familial portrait, the castle itself—turn against those who would wield their authority while the certainty of bloodlines and the lines between different kingdoms (Manfred's and Frederic's; church and state) are increasingly blurred.

Mistaken identities proliferate in the narrative, highlighting the illegibility of bodies as stable systems of signs. Isabella mistakes Theodore for Conrad, Manfred mistakes Theodore for Isabella, Theodore mistakes Matilda for a robber in the cave, Matilda confuses Theodore with the figure in Alphonso's portrait, and Manfred fatally mistakes Isabella for Matilda. The list of mistaken identities for such a short work seems almost too long to enumerate. The consequence for the reader is that all bodies become queer, rendering identity more fantasmatic than corporeal. A statue bleeds, armor grows, a painting shifts its gaze, and ghosts are invested with

physical potency, often more than the humans they rival or represent. Thus, the insignia of the body takes on a life of its own, one which has the potential to betray the life of that body. Given the constant ruptures and irresolution that these reversals present, George E. Haggerty remarks that "the book undermines its own effectiveness as a novel and even seems to work against itself" (*Gothic Fiction*, 345). Nonetheless, if the novel undermines its own authority and clouds its resolution in an indeterminate veil, the novel only thereby replicates for the reader the ambiguity that it creates for its characters.

III. The Novel's Disputed Authorization and Contaminated Genres

One of the most troubling contradictions in the novel occurs before the novel itself even begins. In the first preface, Walpole, in the guise of a mere translator, critiques the purported author of the work. "I am not blind to my author's defects," he writes, "I could wish he had grounded his plan on a more useful moral than this; that *the sins of the fathers are visited on their children to the third and fourth generation*" (xvii). Walpole himself paratextually casts doubt on the moral authority of his own novel, showing it to be based on a fatalistic if not somewhat frivolous bromide. In doing so, he may be emphasizing that his work is primarily "entertainment" (xvi) rather than a tract designed for edification and enlightenment, giving his anachronistic Gothic romance an even more antiquated Old Testament moral. Alternatively, he may be poking fun at Biblical authority itself, since to doubt the usefulness of the novel's proclaimed moral is also to doubt the worth of that moral, which has been enshrined into the foundational Judeo-Christian covenant. At any rate, a fundamental contradiction opens up between the dual prefaces, which alternately purport the novel issues from the "darkest ages of Christianity" (xv) and that it is an Enlightenment era "disguise" (xix). In both cases, the novel's

origin remains under a shroud; whether its writing may be traced to a hidden myth or a modern hoax, each preface revokes the authority—and authorship—claimed by the other.

This conflict, as Marcie Frank shows, is recapitulated outside the text by Walpole's desire both to "circulate and to withhold his own works from circulation" (422). By publishing limited editions of his work from his own press, and then retracting, repackaging, and re-prefacing through different editions, Walpole creates a self-parodic mode of authorship that questions its own authority, and, at times, even its own existence. Within his prefatory addresses, Walpole chooses to conflate multiple genres: not only romance and realist novel, but fiction and theatre. The five chapters of the novel read very much like a neoclassical drama's familiar five act structure, though one that is subject to parody: Walpole at once sedulously obeys and seditiously obviates the unities. Anne Williams also shows how Walpole, a committed opera-goer with "nearly six hundred references to opera" indexed among his correspondence (108), may have juxtaposed different performative modes within *Otranto*, especially as opera—viewed as excessive and distorting sense for the sake of affect—challenged the rationality with which theatre was regarded by straight eighteenth-century cultural guardians. Marcie Frank writes:

> Indeed, taken together, representations of incest, his exercises of symbolic diminishment, his scare-quote treatment of authority, the hoax, and his investments in the theater [not to mention opera, closet drama, décor, and miniatures] articulate a form of parody whose gestures we might find more recognizable under the label of 'camp.' (434)

With such a confluence of artifacts and attitudes, Walpole can be recognized as a fascinating early espouser of the camp sensibility. Camp appropriates the authority of cultural icons while

subverting those icons' import. In this way, camp bears a marked resemblance to the logic of self-parody: camp deploys and subtly alters previous icons to reevaluate their historical significance in light of a new cultural use whereas self-parody deploys previous conventions to contest those conventions against each other. With that being said, though, much that is camp may be well be self-parodic, too.

The register of camp helps us to understand a reader's self-divided affective responses. Fredric Weiss, following Northrop Frye, notes *Otranto*'s comic or "melodramatic" treatment of its tragic materials, and he claims that the Gothic "writer is directing his story at *two* implied readers—the literate/gullible, and the smug sophisticate…. The coexistence of these two planes of narration implies an inherent satire against the gullible reader whose insight is so limited that he or she cannot perceive the irony (20). A camp sensibility, however, may embrace the naïve viewpoint not in spite but *because* it recognizes potential ironies: the delight taken in camp objects is one in which the ironies frequently result in intimacy rather than distanciation. Similarly, Walpole's residence of Strawberry Hill, the castle he designed and curated, may reflect a whimsical, brittle-as-gingerbread resumption of a ponderous and more "authentic" Gothic architecture, which symbolized a stolid British history that nevertheless hints of its buried Catholic past. Recuperating an authority from which he has become estranged, we may be likewise be tempted to read Walpole's career as an author in light of his vexed relationship as the younger son of Prime Minister Robert Walpole, a much derided figure among the literati of the times. Although these biographical details are interesting in their own right, they demonstrate Walpole's camp attitude; they allow us to see how the novel mimics and exaggerates various cultural chestnuts and conventions—including genres—in a double register of both homage and umbrage, appropriating forms while overturning their substance.

Otranto troubles any concept of the straight lines of its own descent by foregrounding its contaminated generic inheritance. Dale Townshend analyzes the disruptions of paternal authority in *Otranto* as dramatizing a generational split between the characters in the novel that embodies Foucault's shift in epistemes between ancient "alliance" models and modern "sexuality," in which the former emphasize "kinship ties, as well as the transmission, circulation, and exchange of cherished names, objects, and possessions" (55) whereas the latter is based on "sentiments of… familial love, romantic attraction, and monogamous devotion" (69). Yet, the straightforward parallel between critical theory and a text it supposedly explicates breaks down. Ironically, the generic codes that *Otranto* merges reverse this historical priority. The older romance genre is concerned with the separation of lovers whose autonomy in their choice of partner often defies parental legislation and oversteps established kinship boundaries, linking it to a more modern concept of sexuality; the newer genre of the realist novel, by contrast, frequently underscores the consolidation of estates and networks of kinship, displaying a residual paradigm of alliance.

Otranto's Gothic form, however, intervenes to challenge the assumptions underlying both the genres of romance and realist novel. Diverging from romance, the initial marriage at the beginning of the novel does not involve a separation of lovers, but rather the immediate death of one lover. In place of the lovers' struggle to reunite, we are presented with a continual substitution of lovers and scenes of paramours fleeing their suitors. The quicksilver, polymorphous nature of passion and the indeterminate identities of the characters undermine the characters' agency to make choices about their "true" love-matches. The lovers' desires cannot stand in opposition to their fate because both terms are in constant flux. Thus, the productive tension that animates traditional romance plots is parodied and notions of sexuality, which may

have been increasingly deployed in the eighteenth century to secure the discursive order of bourgeois society, are thereby shown as having a flimsy basis. Likewise, *Otranto* differs from the realist novel, which often resolves with a family alliance brokered in the marriage plot through a symbolic exchange of lineages, names, property, and estates. Indeed, these two possible generic resolutions are put in opposition: the proposed "double marriage" (75) of Manfred with Isabella and Frederic with Matilda—the traditional ending for a romance commedia—violates the possibility for a realist novels' resolution of kinship alliances since it portrays fathers engaged to their would-be daughters. In this way, Walpole's Gothic novel features a family that is continually broken apart; any scheme to unify the house is fractured by supernatural disruptions. The spectral intrusions in *Otranto* are, in fact, the exaggerated items of exchange in an alliance: a family portrait, a sword, and a suit of armor. These items would otherwise function to give a family symbolic coherence, and might be used to demonstrate kinship bonds in a realist novel, but in this case their weight is insupportable. The items comically falter under the symbolic gravitas they are accorded. Hence, *Otranto* also parodies the system by which kinship models are maintained. The Gothic form contravenes the older romance genre's dependence on "modern" sexuality at the same time that it repudiates the newer realist novel's inscription of a more antiquated concept of alliance.

Both the genres of realist novel and the romance assume traditional marriage plots. By distorting the conventions upholding each, Walpole's Gothic creates a novel temporally suspended between medieval and modern, spatially built upon shifting ground, and generically flexible enough to queer hetero-normative discourse. Max Fincher notes that "one theme that emerges strongly and is related to how we can understand same-sex desire in the late eighteenth century and Romantic age is the fear of the exposure of a secret to a public penetrating eye" (45).

Fincher argues that there is always a possibility that the secrets—which are left unspeakable and referred to in circumlocutory ways throughout *Otranto*—may be queer ones (46), given "the silence and invisibility that surrounded queer bodies in the Romantic age, and the punitive legal system that increasingly condemned those convicted of sodomy to the pillory or hanging" (47). Camp, then, for all its seeming frivolity, may be a coded response to a deadly serious political oppression. Benjamin Bird notes in another context, "it becomes possible to read [*Otranto*] as questioning the legitimacy of the monarchy as such" (190), a questioning that must remain unspeakable, too, since imagining regicide was a capital crime. Bird thus conjectures that Manfred is not punished for his usurpation at the end of *Otranto* because of Walpole's "realization that the appropriate sentence for Manfred's offense would be death" (193). By cloaking his subversive ideas in an insouciant package, Walpole can more safely give expression to unspeakable acts and thoughts; yet, in doing so, he simultaneously raises and erases the familial issues that he brings up.

IV. **Feminine Sources of Agency and Power**

The only thing that seems to ultimately control events in the novel is the moonlight, a faint and spectral glow that intervenes at several key turning points in the text, most notably aiding Isabella to find and then unlock the trapdoor. Escaping Manfred's rapacious advances, Isabella hurries through the castle's vaults where an "imperfect ray of clouded moonshine gleam" reveals "a fragment of earth or building, she could not distinguish which, that appeared to be crushed inwards" where she encounters Theodore, who she believes is "the ghost of her betrothed Conrad" (12). The use here of "moonshine," however, may anticipate the later recorded use of the word to mean "to cheat or deceive (a person) with appealing and persuasive

but empty talk" (OED). The moon has long been associated with a feminine principle—one that operates in the novel as the only guiding light amid the treacherous detours of the castle in which all the male figures bicker and barter for control, even if its illuminations often prove cloudy and changeable. The moon takes on an ironic presence as the feminine counterpart to the ghost of Alphonso. The seemingly beneficent force of the moon is implicated as an imperfect trickster, a foggy ruse amidst the castle's labyrinth of juridical rhetoric and double talk. The mistaken doubling of Theodore for Conrad is later revealed to have foreshadowed Isabella's eventual marriage at the end of the novel to the estate's heir, Theodore (not Conrad, as it appeared in the beginning). Her errant apprehension ironically proves correct in so far as Theodore has displaced Conrad's role. Wandering the vaults, Isabella envisions the castle as its own grave, both ground and groundless, unable to mark a difference between the earth and the building, which appears crushed inwards as if lacking a definitive keystone to hold it up.

Similarly, "a ray of moonshine streaming through a cranny of the ruin above, sh[ines] directly on the lock" of the trapdoor (13). The description of the vault as a "ruin" acts as subtext for Isabella's own ruin. The moonlight invests Isabella and Theodore's first encounter with sexual significance. Just as the moonlight pierces through a cranny, it enables Isabella to open the trapdoor, upon which she exclaims, "Oh! transport!" (ibid). Transport is a multivalent pun that plays on both Isabella's discovery of a means of escape and her feelings of sexual ecstasy, besides being eighteenth-century slang for a common form of punishment: sentencing a prisoner to be transported to the Americas. The term also refers to any out-of-body experience, a paroxysm of rapture in which the spirit leaves its mortal house. Whereas the symbolic penetration and discovery of the door insinuates the carnal—and foreshadows the legal—union of Isabella and Theodore, in so far as transport connotes *ek-stasis*, it registers a phantom-like

divorce of soul from body and, perhaps, spirit from the letter of the law, suggesting both imprisonment and escape. Transport is the root meaning of metaphor itself, the carrying over of meaning by the vehicle of a trope. Nonetheless, in Otranto's atmosphere of "moonshine," there appears no pillar of literal stability, or stable literalism, since all blurs into gloom and endless gloss. Though Isabella assumes she may be escaping her ruin from Manfred and meeting a hero in Theodore, the reader suspects that Isabella may be running into the clutches of another potential ravisher. Which characters are valorized as licit and which as leery remains—up to the novel's very last page—subject to riddles and reversals.

Isabella, despite her protests of modesty, nevertheless reveals her cunning since she obviously has had experience that has led her to discover the trapdoor in the vaults before, breathlessly turning her tricky ways in the castle's subterranean pixie-paths and penetralia. Bianca, the loquacious servant who acts as go-between, later gossips that Isabella may be less than innocent; and Matilda, in a jealous pique, surmises it is probably not a mere coincidence that Isabella manages to get herself saved (or, perhaps, ruined) by Theodore twice in some shady cavern. In fact, Isabella's enchantment is the sole power that is depicted as capable of opening the trapdoor, and thereby gaining mastery of the house. Theodore did not observe her "method of touching the spring" (13), hinting that Isabella's erotic control over the domain is mysterious and ungraspable by male manipulation. The door, nevertheless, *is* a trap—a means of giving Manfred, Theodore, and any other pursuant suitor the slip; it is ambivalently both a secret route to freedom and another of the castle's alluring ambuscades. If Isabella's trapdoor is an intricate recess only privy to her female wiles, the door of the castle itself is promiscuously left open so that the giant sword has no problem being thrust in by Frederic's many men-at-arms. The novel thereby offers a parody of this same metaphor, transforming the castle into a feminine vessel.

Finally, at the novel's climax—after Manfred has stabbed Matilda, mistaking her for Isabella, and before Alfonso rises up to destroy the castle, almost as if being born from its womb—"the moon was now at its height, and [Manfred] read in the countenances of this unhappy company, the event he dreaded" (89). In one sense, the phrase "the moon was now at its height" is a circumlocution indicating that the scene takes place at midnight, a traditional time of witchery and transformation. In another sense, though, the moon here is a figure of lunacy, the madness that has infected the castle, now in its height of frenzy. Moonlight is a fickle imposter, a plagiarism of the original light of the Platonic sun, a mere mimic, a quixotic projection and mystifying aura of counter-enlightenment, both a reflection and a repository of passion, a ghastly indication of a truth impossible to attain. Ironically, then, the full moon at its height allows Manfred, for once, to correctly "read" the signs that beset him. It is Manfred's ruin that is divulged to him. Despite this moment of clarity, moonlight is unstable, frenzied, an untrustworthy source. Moonlight both allows reading to occur and threatens to change the text. It is as intractable and troubling as interpretation itself.

Indeed, "gliding softly between the aisles, and guided by an imperfect gleam of moonshine that shone faintly through the illuminated windows, Manfred stole towards the tomb of Alfonso" where he kills Matilda (86). If moonshine has previously come to the aid of Isabella in escaping, it here miraculously confuses matters so that her rival is murdered. Isabella is a sorceress of moonshine, a silver-tongued confidence woman who slides through the loopholes or slides off the belt loops of male power to make herself queen. In a mutable kingdom, she alone can navigate the passages, both textual and architectural, to enact her designs.

V. Thinking Backwards: Myths of Origin and Retroactive Causation in Prophecies

Matilda's sacrifice at the tomb of Alfonso represents the fulfillment of Manfred's utterance, "Begone! I do not want a daughter" (6). Manfred mistakenly believes in the order of patrilineal descent in which a daughter would do him no good, yet he dismisses the "slight foundation… [of] a silly girl's report" (36), uncomprehending how the lineage of a house is built upon the veracity of women to report the father's identity. Manfred rejects his daughter by blood only to pursue his would-be daughter-in-law. Ultimately, it is Matilda's blood that he spills on the tomb since she is the only innocent in the book, the virgin to Isabella's whore, yet one who his knife symbolically penetrates. Her sacrifice ironically recapitulates the Biblical story of the binding of Isaac on the altar at the same time that it figuratively represents incest.

The binding of Isaac, needless to say, is one of the most disputed cruxes in Biblical hermeneutics, in part because if God intended Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, then He would be breaking His covenant with Abraham: Abraham would be unable to father a people through Isaac. Inheritance would go through Ishmael, Abraham's first born. Of course, in this story, too, it is matrilineal descent that really counts (in Judeo-Christian accounts, at least, rather than Muslim ones). Interestingly, the *King James Version* states that "God did tempt Abraham" (Genesis 22.1); how could a command by God also be a temptation? Possibly Abraham's temptation was to zealously over-interpret God's command, murdering his son instead of simply "offer[ing] him for a burnt offering" (Genesis 22.2). An offer may be refused, as Abraham seems to correctly surmise given that he tells his servants that "the lad and I… will come again to you" and when Isaac asks where the lamb is, Abraham astutely answers that "God will provide himself a lamb" (Genesis 22.5-8). God provides a ram at the last minute—a *deus ex machina* that averts a tragedy, allowing Isaac to be the literal scapegoat and thereby preserving the covenant. While many interpret this passage as indicating Abraham's utter blindness of faith, a mad leap

into the abyss of unreason, one could alternatively view Abraham as a shrewd interpreter, finagling ways to strictly obey a command without forfeiting other laws. Or, one could see him as playing a mean game of chicken in which he calls God's bluff. Walpole's purported "moral" decidedly refers back to this event, showing the instability that lurks in this patriarchal myth of origins since it raises the question of who are the father's legitimate sons.

A similar logic of substitution governs Matilda dying, as it were, in Isabella's place, ironically cutting off Manfred's line, and subsequently provoking the confession that the contract, which bequeathed sovereignty upon Manfred's ancestor, was knowingly void all along. Manfred, unlike Abraham, fails in his exegesis of the binding (or perhaps double-binding) contract, and his covenant is consequently broken. Furthermore, Manfred not only stabs Matilda in the back, but imaginatively penetrates Isabella in an act of would-be incest. Manfred finds himself caught in the narrowing confines of royal endogamy as that system contracts into outright incest. Hippolita is related to him "in the fourth degree" by bloodlines while Isabella had been his contracted daughter-in-law. He is trapped by his etiolated aristocratic pedigree, even though, it is at last revealed, he derives from peasant stock.[1] Competing claims disrupt both lineal descent and legal determinations, and, like prophecy, both are readable only in retrospect.

The book's initial prophecy that "*the Castle and Lordship of Otranto should pass from the present family whenever the real owner should be too large to inhabit it*" can be interpreted in various ways. Alfonso may be the real owner, but his gigantism may also be an allegory for the hyperbolic cockiness of absolute power that results in tyranny. Alternatively, the real owner

[1] I suspect that Theodore is the love-child of Jerome and Hippolita, since those two often surreptitiously collude. This would explain why the otherwise seemingly pious Hippolita is almost eager for a divorce, and plans to flee into the monastery where Jerome presides. In such a case, Hippolita would be equivalent to the barren Sarai, who nonetheless belatedly "produces" an offspring; it would also result in a quasi-incestuous marriage since Isabella is Hippolita's all-but-legally adopted daughter while Theodore would be her clandestine bastard child. This reading has the virtue of explaining why the house "collapses in on itself," just when Theodore is on the verge of apparently rectifying Alfonso's inheritance: the kinship ties would become incestuous no matter who is married.

may refer to the totality of the (over-) extended family, a pedigree that is paradoxically polluted by its purity, whether through contaminated bloodlines or contractual dotted lines. Then again, the real owner may be too large because the ownership is dispersed over several claims, none of which has priority because each appeals to divergent traditions and codes of law. Manfred's repeatedly calling his servants "blockheads" hints that the state—metonymically represented by the castle—may literally be composed of the people who act as its building blocks. The text, in fact, baldly declares that "it was difficult to make any sense of this prophecy; and still less easy to conceive what it had to do with the marriage in question. Yet these mysteries, or contradictions, did not make the populace adhere the less to their opinion" (1). The prophecy is connected to the "sterility" (ibid) of Manfred and Hippolita's conjugal relations through its pun on "less easy to conceive." More overtly, however, the prophecy is shown to be the ill omen which both frames the entire narrative and which casts it into indecipherability and outright contradiction. The meaning of the prophecy can only become clear after-the-fact, and hence it cannot be disproved. Its foreboding menace is simply a cipher, which is retrospectively made to signify the events that it supposedly predicts; this backwards causation is not unlike Manfred's own designs to legitimize his line by the power gained after he has usurped authority, covering up the trail of illegitimacy and creating a false origin myth. It also resembles the false origin myth proclaimed, and then revoked, by Walpole's dual prefaces.

The Castle of Otranto, then, juxtaposes various juridical traditions that authorize ambiguous outcomes, demonstrating the unfinished writing of history, which always remains to be re-interpreted. But it does so in a manner of self-parody, wherein the authorial aegis of the text is itself rendered conspicuously plural and uncertain, odd and at odds with itself. Walpole's work refuses to be dichotomized into such easy generic categories as romance or realism, loyalist

or revolutionary, comedy or tragedy, drama or narrative, naïve or sophisticated, camp or straight. Every source of authority is ghosted by another, as the foundation of the patriarchal order of law is repeatedly shown to be overblown and self-refuting. The characters slip through cracks or create loopholes in the legal frameworks in which they are reticulated as easily as they escape or break through the slippery passageways of the castle walls. Permeable and interpenetrating, the house cannot support these irresolvable, incorrigibly plural structures of power. Famously, the text begins with prefaces, which differ in how they frame the story, negating what they assert. It is rather that the novel belongs to all of these (and none of these) norms at once. The prefaces are a gesture towards the possibilities of the text to partake without belonging, or, perhaps, to inhabit without owning a genre; the prefaces act as a counter-law, which not only opposes a law but also helps to account for it. In a similar paradox, *The Castle of Otranto* evades genre through its "late ambiguous discourse" (69) even as it has retrospectively become the founding (and foundling) father of Gothic.

The Law in One's Hands: *The Old English Baron* and Invisible Hands in Marriage

The Old English Baron seems to represent hetero-normative feudal structures of inheritance being worked out to accord with emerging meritocratic principles. However, against this interpretation, I argue that many of the lower-class characters are passing as straight and law-abiding, just as the novel itself passes for most of its readers as a traditionally moralistic tale. The hetero-normative critical reception, in fact, has condemned the novel's denouement as especially tedious. The protracted ending, however, superimposes the rise of a fraternity of lower-class males onto the appearance of orderly schemes of marriage inheritance and

apportionment of property. The hand of providence that justifies the turns in the plot can also be read as the specter of homosexuality that hovers over the text: what really directs the course of the novel is the male fraternity subversively plotting to gain the upper hand. Indeed, positivist juridical procedures of property law and criminal justice are shown as contradictory and self-refuting. In terms of the novel's Gothic genre, chivalric codes of male knights are merged with the realist domestic novel to produce a queer subtext. Identities are doubled and authorities are rendered doubtful, including the textual authority of the novel itself. Through these means, the novel becomes self-parodic, addressing contested communities of readers and undermining the very ideology that it ostensibly supports.

I. Queer Passing

Clara Reeve's *The Old English Baron* queers the family structure that underwrites legal and economic hierarchies so that its plot hinges not on the outcome of heterosexual unions but rather on non-exclusive male alliances that imitate and parody the structure of marriage. The destabilization of a hetero-normative cultural logic in the book, however, takes place through a narrative of thoroughgoing ambiguity: the "sentimental" reader is predisposed to decode the text's political implications along terms of either a defense of aristocratic privilege or a bourgeois apologetic for an emerging meritocracy, while the queer reader may see in the text a radical critique of both these economic and legal norms. For the queer reader, the text is an allegory about mastering the superficial signs and discourses by which one can "pass" in the larger culture in order to become upwardly mobile.

Likewise, the book itself is designed to "pass" as a sentimental romance for the majority of its readership, and, indeed, most critics have generally assimilated the text to conservative

ideals of the romance genre, which abet the chivalric, feudal structure of class and gender relations, or, as some more recent critics have argued, to a late eighteenth-century mercantile challenge of aristocratic assumptions through valorizing such ideals as hard work and reputation that were integral to early capitalism. For both sets of readers, the book has "passed" all too successfully, as it has for non-readers from which it has passed away as a curio of literary history, without much recognition of how the text is haunted—and, ultimately, controverted—by its queer counter-romance depicting a male confederacy composed of lower-class figures and outsiders that usurp the text's authority and title.

The problem in the novel, from a queer point of view, is how the secret fraternal utopia of males can be reconciled with, and even replace, the hetero-normative strictures of society at large; once this has been achieved, everyone has their proverbial happy ending. Most critics, however, have glossed over (or have been ignorant of) these queer subtexts. Kate Ferguson Ellis, for example, argues that Reeve offers a feminized version of *Otranto*, having "domesticated Walpole's curious structure." *The Old English Baron*, she claims, "looks forward to a cozier, nineteenth-century vision of home" (61). Yet she also states that "the rivalry among the males in the baron's family is a mini-war" (62). Ellis reconciles these claims by viewing the conflict in the novel as "love, not wealth," but presumably a love that is normatively familial or hetero. (ibid). The resolution requires Robert to return voluntarily "to the patriarchal fold" (65) so that the Baron Fitz-Owen can bestow his ultimate approval upon Edmund. Ellis's interpretation neglects the fact that the Baron Fitz-Owen is himself dismissed at the end, peremptorily retired to a castle in the hinterlands. More important, it overlooks the relative importance of the details of pecuniary matters in the novel, especially considered against the nearly nonexistent registration of emotion between Edmund and Baron Fitz-Owen. The relationships between Edmund and Sir

Philip as well as Edmund and William both display far more anxiety and warmth. If the site of the home has been feminized or domesticated, it is hard to see how any of the female characters have enacted this since they are passive and distinctly relegated to the margins, as even Ellis acknowledges.

Ellis does point out that there are "two parallel instances of rivalry/jealousy," (66) which are Walter Lovel's jealousy of Arthur Lovel and Wenlock's jealousy of Edmund. Ellis reads both instances as examples of a suitor who has been disqualified from winning his desired beloved by a rival who has superior merits, as Reeve's vision of love is an idealized one that operates on justly awarding merit. While the novel makes explicit overtures toward this idea, one might also notice that Walter Lovel and Wenlock are the only characters who seem to express any explicit heterosexual desire in the novel. A counter-reading of Ellis might suggest that the novel portrays heterosexual desire as jealous by its very nature. The polyamorous homoerotic couplings among the various males, however, seem immune from jealousy since they share affection in a utopian fraternity that is, within its secret bounds, almost devoid of sexual scarcity. Given the preponderance of normative readings of the text, there is a doubling of passing at work: the queer male characters leverage a difference in perception to gain their ends just as the text itself can circulate in a wider context by pretending to be a harmless ghost-story with a traditionally moralistic ending.

II. Problems with the Novel's Hetero-normative Critical Reception

The Old English Baron receives little more than a cursory gloss from most historians of Gothic fiction, who paraphrase it in terms that do little to reveal the novel's many dimensions

Robert Donald Spector, assembling a bibliographical guide to the criticism on Reeve in 1984, says bluntly:

> Nothing in either the life or fiction of Clara Reeve has stirred the critical or scholarly imagination. Not even the recent interest in women's writing aroused by feminist studies has brought about a perceptible change in the situation: the author of *The Old English Baron* continues to be ignored…. To be sure, not much in either her life or work is likely to attract great attention. (98)

Hence, when even those who study Reeve have been so dour in their assessments, it is no wonder that the complexities of the novel have long been overlooked. More recent criticism seems to bear out Spector's claim, with the largest controversy in Reeve criticism being to what degree she promotes a middle-class, mercantile ideology of merit and/or Christian piety. Diane Long Hoeveler bundles *The Old English Baron* with several other Gothic novels, all of which she claims "reveal much the same impulse and originating fantasy: the notion that young women are the innocent prey of their parents' evil designs on them" (56). One is left to wonder if Hoeveler read the book since it features no female protagonists or if she is making a more astute, unstated argument that reads the femininized Edmund as a "young woman" in a male guise. George E. Haggerty's flippant dismissal of the novel in a single sentence as "genteel, moralistic novelizing" (*Queer Gothic*, 21) is perhaps surprising in the context of his long-standing interest in the queer Gothic.

Fred Botting is typical of critics giving the novel slightly more respectful consideration. He views *The Old English Baron* primarily in terms of its redaction of *Otranto*, though again

emphasizing the seemingly conservative nature of Reeve's text. Botting accepts Reeve's own claim that her book keeps within the bounds of probability, and he states that Reeve's work "attempts to reduce the ambivalent effects of Gothic fiction…. Ghostly machinations are kept to a minimum, and, though the customs and settings of feudal times are invoked, they are contained by eighteenth-century sentiments" (54). He reads Reeve's fiction as preserving conventional eighteenth-century values, ultimately subsuming any transgressions that arise during the narrative in a sentimental ideology, and justifying aristocratic privilege in terms of meritocratic virtue. Furthermore, Botting argues, "not only do virtue, morality and social and domestic harmony prevail, they are, so the cautionary ending declares, divinely sanctioned and protected" (56). While Botting presents a legitimate potential interpretation, one which is likely shared by the majority of the text's hetero-normative sentimental-minded readers both then and now, he overlooks the crucial ways that the text's apparent bourgeois apologetics conceal a much more radical critique of eighteenth-century norms.

The ambivalence of Reeve's text is not foregrounded as it is in Walpole's. Nonetheless, the novel creates uneasy seams not so much between the uncanny and the realistic as between sentimental romance and bureaucratic accounting, a hetero-normative courtship narrative and a story emphasizing homosocial ties, which blur fraternal, paternal, and erotic relations. There is also an ambiguity in how the novel mends its generic differences between being a predominantly homosocial chivalric romance quest and a hetero-normative, domesticated, and by-and-large realist sentimental novel. These ambivalences in the *Old English Baron* have been made more powerful precisely by the effort to conceal them, similar to the way the force of traumatic events may depend in part on their repression. The all-seeing hand of providence that acts as the novel's moral guarantor may appear reassuring for Botting's theoretical eighteenth-century sentimental

readership, but it misses the irony that other eighteenth-century audiences may have been apt to perceive. The hand that underwrites the novel's harmonious conclusion is not God's, but the author's.

The novel's legalistic denouement, which is often faulted for taking almost half the book, is conspicuously intricate and involved in its working-out of all the fine points of contractual propriety. What most other commentators regard as the novel's structural flaw is, rather, a clue to its ambivalent undertone. In order to end with a harmonious conclusion, many incidental and circumstantial details must align for Reeve's characters: for example, the Baron Fitz-Owen just happens to own another castle in Wales to which he may retire, Water Lovel has an additional castle in Northumberland for which he abandons the haunted home of his ancestors, and Robert marries Lord Clifford's eldest daughter so that he will not be dispossessed of an inheritance. While some readers may accept this happenstance as within the bounds of both probability and propriety, offering a picture of how providence guides human events, others likely recognize the precarious contingencies and narrative lengths that the author has had to go so she could engineer a happy ending. Rather than confirming the hand of providence, then, the plot's elaboration highlights a concern with problematizing rectitude, acting ironically to cast suspicion on the status quo and thereby showing it as precarious. The motive spring of the plot has been set in motion by a disturbance to the structure primogeniture, but this disturbance is two-fold, symbolized by the fact that the house has changed hands not once but twice when Sir Philip arrives on the scene. The hetero rupture results from Walter Lovel's sexual jealousy; the queer rupture results from the challenge to primogeniture that Sir Philip's amorous relation with his friend Arthur Lovel entails. The plot is not simply overcorrecting for the buried murder that threatens to undo the hetero-normative structure of inheritance, it is rewriting the ascent of the

band of male outsiders *in terms of* the rectification of hetero-normative inheritance, and therefore further burying the initial queer disruption of male-male amorous desire. The apparently excessive detail that the novel provides to secure "correct" property and kinship relations ironically acts to smokescreen the machinations of the queer male alliance.

III. The Hand of Providence and the Specter of Homosexuality

Similarly, the hand of providence appears in Adam Smith's contemporaneous *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) as the "invisible hand," which is used to explain—or, rather, explain away—how self-interested actors can produce socially beneficent results and how the market can achieve equilibrium in the absence of government regulations. Stefan Andriopoulos notes how Smith's use of this metaphor tends to metonymically fill-in a gap in the explanatory design of Smith's rationalist economic argument, naturalizing a supernatural agency as an everyday and law-abiding occurrence. In *Otranto* Walpole, on the contrary, uses the specter of an invisible hand to highlight the absurdity of supernatural intervention, or at least to make the occasion of otherworldly interference in human affairs appear miraculous, terrifying, or fantastic. Andriopoulos argues that Reeve's use of the invisible hand is "less tangible" (743), and likewise naturalizes the supernatural interventions that occur in her narrative, in a similar manner to Smith's use of the trope, except the "sentimental version" of the Gothic novel to which Reeve adheres "preaches self-denial instead of self-interest" (749). But, in making this claim, Andripoulos assumes the sentimental nature of Reeve's novel. Changing the sexual-orientation of the implied reader position can emphasize different generic features of the text: queer readers might perceive the gender-bending exploits of Early Modern romance tales more than eighteenth-century sentimental romance novels. Giving the text a straight reading, Andriopoulos

views Edmund *not* as a scheming upstart whose plotting results in material gain, but as a sanctimonious hero lifted up simultaneously by his own efforts and the grace of god. The invisible agency that seems most conspicuous on an ironic queer reading, however, is the behind-the-scenes machinations that Edmund arranges with Sir Philip, the priest, and others in his secret fraternity, which results in their joint rise to power. In this reading, the guiding hand of providence becomes a convenient alibi, which validates and covers up their self-interests in the name of piety.

Hence, the novel offers a far more troubling interpretation that actually contradicts bourgeois appeasement and conventional eighteenth-century middle-class sentiments. The surface patterning of marriages, punishments, alliances, and apportionments of property has been rendered unerringly correct in *The Old English Baron* because a queer counter-morality lurks below the novel's surface, which views such bourgeois moral norms as oppressive and superficial. The novel's fracture between a feudal background of primogeniture and an emerging capitalist system of a presumed meritocracy opens up a space for the queer characters to operate to become upwardly mobile, playing-off one ideology against the other. Yet, the ascent of the queer characters challenges *both* the primogeniture's foundational idea of a "natural father" and the early capitalist notion of the legibility of one's intrinsic character. The exaggerated correctness with which economic compensation (and, implicitly along with it, moral approval) is distributed at the novel's drawn-out conclusion points out the dubious jury-rigging of the social mechanisms that supposedly ensure justice. As David Punter and Glennis Byron, in offering a plot summary of the novel, write:

> Characters repeatedly demonstrate their moral superiority by their self-possession in encounters with the supernatural. Sustained by virtue and prayer, Edmund and his companions remain notably untroubled by their experiences; indeed, by the third night of the vigil in the haunted chamber, "being somewhat familiarized to it," they are able to carry on happily with their conversations and quite disregard the fearful groans that so insistently rise from beneath the floorboards. (160)

Though Punter and Byron do not argue that Reeve's novel evinces anything other than a bourgeois or a Christian moral framework, their remarks nonetheless hint at potential undertones of parody. One may suspect that it is not Edmund's piety that gives him immunity from the ghosts, but rather his worldly, secular attitude that immures him from ghostly bugaboos, whether holy or haunting. Indeed, the groans in the mysterious chamber seem redolent of a sexual initiation ceremony performed by a group of men in a clandestine bedroom. In this way, the ghostly hand of providence is exchanged for the manual erotic manipulation of a young Adonis.

Such an interpretation is only abetted when the same scene is reenacted. E.J. Clery writes that "there is a replay of [Edmund's] supernatural experiences as farce… Wenlock and Markham undergo Edmund's ordeal in the haunted apartment, begin squabbling, and are ordered out by the ghost in armour" (35). The novel's strategy, then, is one of self-parody in which the (nominally) more straight and bungling duo of Wenlock and his cousin Markham repeat the haunted bed-chamber scene Edmund and his confreres volunteered for. If the scene carries sexual innuendo on the first occurrence, the second occurrence renders those sexual undertones in a more comic register. In fact, Wenlock and Markham almost appear in a lover's quarrel, with Wenlock "perceiving [Markham] was serious in his anger, began to soothe him; he persuaded, he flattered,

he promised great things if he would be composed" (68). It is only when the two cannot make up (or out) and instead are on the verge of fighting that the spectral armor (or amor) intervenes. Both scenes feature the ghost, and so, in manner of speaking, the specter of homosexuality hovers around both groups. Edmund and his friends, though, grow accustomed to the groans of the ghost by the end of the third night (60), which also somewhat comically deflates the ghost's significance. This could also mean that they have accepted their homoerotic desires within the haunt of the secret closet.

IV. **Underhanded Plots to Gain the Upper Hand**

The juxtaposition of the scenes highlights the difference of cooperation and animosity between the two groups. The old servant Joseph, Father Oswald, and Edmund repeatedly engage in secret meetings, oaths of silence, and hushed rendezvous throughout the novel. Edmund willingly volunteers to re-renter the bed-chamber and closet even though Baron Fitz-Owen feels that one night has been enough to prove his courage. The bed-chamber can be viewed as where Edmund discovers his place as rightful heir or as the meeting-place at which he plots his rise to power with other non-aristocrats. While ostensibly gathering evidence of Edmund's legitimate claim, they act in a decidedly conspiratorial and even underhanded way. For example, "after much contrivance, [Father Oswald] determined to take a bold step, and, if he were discovered, to frame some excuse. Encouraged by his late success, he went on tip-toe into Master William's chamber, placed a letter on his pillow, and withdrew unheard" (61). His "bold step" must proceed on "tip-toe" because of its illicit nature. Oswald's behavior, then, even though it is in the service of furthering Edmund's rise—and in this case, acting as the go-between for Edmund and William—is put in a suspicious light.

That this suspicion should redound upon Edmund, too, is made clear when he is questioned in a "trial" where Baron Fitz-Owen sits "with the dignity of a judge" and charges him with "some indiscretions, for I cannot properly call them crimes" (32). Here Fitz-Owen opens up a space in which to dispute exactly what constitutes a crime, already mitigating criminal actions but also suggesting to the queer reader sexual peccadillos. Edmund replies that "if by [Wenlock and others'] artifices your Lordship should be induced to think me guilty, I would submit to your sentence in silence, and appeal to another tribunal" (32-33). Though Edmund claims he would appeal to God for justice, Wenlock points out his words may suggest a rift in the law by which Edmund might insolently appeal to a higher earthly court, as well. The novel thus highlights the doublespeak of Edmund. One might see Wenlock as eager to misconstrue his statements or one might regard Edmund as a crafty litigator who can circumvent punishment with his quick wit. When Edmund is then cross-examined about his secret conversation with Oswald, "he related most of the conversation that passed in the wood; but in the part that concerned the family Lovel, he abbreviated as much as possible. Oswald's countenance cleared up, for he had done the same before Edmund came" (33). The conversation "passes" in a double sense. Fitz-Owen questions the two conspirators separately, seeing whether their stories align. The passage reveals that Edmund artfully suppresses the truth through what he leaves out, lying by omission. These silences are structurally similar to the lacuna that the text employs on an extradiegetic level: the erasure hints that there remains more to this story, which the reader may uncover. Furthermore, this early trial scene in which Edmund is falsely proven innocent indicates the distorted nature of the law, which can cause the careful reader to doubt the justice of the novel's later trial scenes.

The climax of the novel hinges on a duel between Sir Philip Harclay—Edmund's proxy—and Sir Walter Lovel, an antiquated judicial procedure, considering that the novel's feudal setting nevertheless consistently avails itself of contemporary eighteenth century norms. Resorting to the chivalric justice of a duel reveals conflicting interpretations of law within the novel, such as likewise takes place in *Sir Charles Grandison*. On the one hand, the tradition of dueling persisted until the early nineteenth century both in real life (most famously in the Hamilton-Burr duel) and in literature (prominently, for example, in *Eugene Onegin*). In this context, readers could understand Reeve's account of the duel, then, as an earnest plot device that takes judicial procedures out of the hands of men and delivers them directly into the hands of providence. On the other hand, however, the duel is a ridiculously arbitrary intervention, an anachronistic act that falls outside the normative structure of eighteenth-century law and order. It aligns the feudal code of gentlemen with warlords and mercenaries, blurring the distinction between leisured eighteenth-century aristocrats who uphold the laws and renegade vigilantes who take the law into their own hands. Thus, the importance of the duel is dual, and depends on the framework of the readership. If most of the criticism on *The Old English Baron* has viewed its narrative as one of ideological containment, there remains much to be said for a more transgressive interpretation of the novel.

The need for a duel is predicated on a peculiar dilemma in bringing Lord Walter Lovel to account for his villainous actions. Sir Philip remarks of the catch-22 that they face in prosecuting Lord Lovel:

> Shall I go to court, and demand justice of the King? Or shall I accuse him of the murder and make him stand a publick trial? If I treat him as a Baron of the realm, he must be tried by his peers; if as a commoner, he must be tried at the county assize. (78-79)

Sir Philip's speech highlights the fact that there are literally two systems of justice, one for aristocrats and one for commoners. Thus, it may insinuate a latent class antagonism: only those who belong to the peerage can be afforded a trial by one's peers. But Philip's speech also goes further to mock the standards of the justice system(s) since it shows that deciding in which court to prosecute the criminal begs the very question whether Walter Lovel is rightfully a Lord. A ruling that Lord Lovel committed the crimes of which they accuse him would ironically invalidate the ruling since then he should not have been tried as a noble in the first place. Likewise, they cannot prosecute him at the county assize since his prerogative as a *prima facie* nobleman forbids it. There may be an unstated premise that Lord Lovel could not be tried in both courts due to double jeopardy, or, more technically, the English Common Law doctrine of *autrefois acquit*. The solution to seek extrajudicial measures "as private as possible" (79) can thus be viewed as a critique of the limitations of the existing legal norms. The backdoor method to seek recourse in a wholly private rather than a public juridical procedure parallels the male characters' secret plot behind closed doors. The duel not only cast aspersion on the fairness of the judicial system itself, but a suspicion on whether the conspiring actions of Sir Philip and Edmund themselves are licit.

The duel presents several complications, if not outright contradictions. For example, once Walter Lovel has fallen in the duel, Sir Philip and his friends declare that "it was better… to keep their prisoner on this side of the borders," highlighting the shaky liminal ground they stand on in

prosecuting the case. When Walter Lovel protests, "Then I am a prisoner, it seems?" though, he is answered in the negative. The confession they extract from him under duress is ostensibly given to absolve his sins, yet it leads directly to the material advantage of Sir Philip and Edmund. The contrived "points of honor and ceremony" (86) harken back to a chivalric code of romance, though one that raises questions at every turn. Lord Clifford and Lord Graham, who are Sir Philip's friends, are appointed judges of the field; they are far from impartial arbitrators. Moreover, when Edmund embraces Sir Philip, Sir Philip, "was dressed in compleat armour with his visor down" (87), which emphasizes the armor's mask-like quality. This armorial masking is a trope from epic romance quests such as *The Faerie Queene,* and *Orlando Furioso,* wherein it has the potential to obscure gender identity as well as confuse presumed alliances. Edmund's identity, too, is potentially counterfeit; "his device was a hawthorn, with a graft of a rose upon it," symbolizing his adoption by Sir Philip, emblematically grafted onto Philip's family tree. However, Philip urges Edmund to replace the motto "*This is not my true parent*" with "*e fructu arbor cognoscitur*," (87), which means "the tree is known by its fruit." Such a message, redolent with forbidden fruit, and more clandestine in Latin than the English insignia, deviously erases the marks of primogeniture, symbolizing that Edmund *is* Philip's offspring in ways that are superior to mere bloodlines. Indeed, the issue of the duel itself seems to assert that male friendship can run deeper than "natural" kinship since Sir Philip defends his friend from the murderer, who has killed his own brother. The ostentatious declaration of male bonds appears like marriage banns throughout the novel, especially in this case since Sir Philip is Edmund's champion, a role a knight conventionally takes towards a damsel.

V. Chivalric and Homoerotic Codes

For readers on the look-out for queer subtexts, the book's title, in fact, presents them with the first ambiguity. Does the title refer to a baron who is both old and English or a baron whose story has been written in the Old English language? The second option is a possibility since a conceit of the novel is that it has been translated from an Old English manuscript. Nonetheless, in the second edition, Reeve's introduction makes clear that she is the author of the text and has based her initial ruse on *The Castle of Otranto*, which likewise passed itself off as a translation of a Gothic manuscript in its first edition. The novel's earlier title, *The Champion of Virtue*, could refer to either the protagonist, Edmund Twyford, as the novel's eventual "winner" or Sir Philip Harclay, as one who actively defends virtue—but there might also lurk a more tongue-in-cheek meaning in that "virtue" denotes chastity, and hence, the male characters are "champions" of virtue either because they defend or conquer virginity, whether in the female characters or (more likely) amongst each other. Similarly with *The Old English Baron*, deciding who the title *of* the book refers to is as ambiguous as deciding to whom the title *in* the book should be disposed: to parse the title so that it refers to the protagonist and eventual owner of the disputed estate, the young Edmund, requires a reading in which the reader plays along with the novel's admittedly false conceit of deriving the text from the Old English. Edmund, like the book of which he is a part, has an ambiguous title based upon a false pedigree.

The most telling aspect of the title, however, might be its homonym: the original old baron, Arthur Lovel, whom Sir Philip comes to visit at the novel's beginning, is discovered to have died *barren* of any heir. This fact sets the whole novel into motion: the courtroom-like details concerning propriety and proprietorship far outweigh any narrative of hetero-normative courtship. Eventually, Edmund "proves" that he was Lovel's lost orphan and rightful heir, a narrative convention that becomes so *de rigueur* in later Gothic romances that it is the source of

parody in texts such as *Great Expectations* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*: what few may recognize, however, is that this Gothic convention began as self-parodic. The pun is already there for the barren baron, and it is our first clue that Edmund's so-called proof is based on ambiguous signs, which may pique the taste of a queer reader, since it leads to a suspicion that the unfruitful Arthur Lovel was the "fruity" Sir Philip's lover. Edmund, having Arthur Lovel as his biological father and Sir Philip as his adopted father, can symbolically be seen as their improbable issue.

The affection Sir Philip expresses for Arthur Lovel seems beyond the bounds of homosociality, even in the more exaggerated terms it could take in the late eighteenth century: he "contracted a strict friendship" with Arthur. Yet, his friend's lack of correspondence he "imputed… to the difficulties of intercourse, common at that time" (5). Even more than the common "intercourse" they did or did not share, the friendship itself is described as "contracted," an odd locution the strictness of which suggests tort law—and, more specifically perhaps, marriage contracts—while also, according to the OED, vaguely connoting "to plot, conspire" and the sense of "contracting" a communicable disease. Alternatively, the very strictness of the friendship is belied by the fact that Arthur seems remiss in his letters. In fact, looked at another way, the definitions of "strict" include "drawn or pressed tightly together; tight; close," "intimate," "secret; privy," and even "rigid," with its phallic overtones (OED). For the queer reader, therefore, a strict friendship might ironically imply one that goes beyond platonic friendship.

The other male characters share undercurrents of queer passion, as well. Raymond W. Wise states, "Lady Emma's role is too meagre and insignificant for her to function as heroine" (59) while "Edmund is as passionless and mannered as Emma" (60). But Edmund is only

passionless according to heterosexual norms of desire. As Ruth Perry more perceptively writes, the work involves "mostly male characters," but "the situations and forms of expressiveness in this novel are transposed from the female-centered sentimental novel of the day: the main characters blanch and blush and weep as often as they engage in manly exercise and swordplay" (115). Perry's observes how the female-centric domestic novel has been transposed onto the chivalric romance quest of male knights, a generic hybridity that may produce a situation in which the swordplay is coded as homoerotic love-taps. Perry cites the ending scene in which Edmund embraces the knees of Baron Fitz-Owen and Sir Philip Harclay, unable to speak, then faints in the arms of the latter. Perry calls Edmund, "a hero with the sensibility of a woman" and notes he "occupies a feminised position in the novel" (115). These seemingly gratuitous displays indicate Edmund's passionate bonds of affection with Sir Philip and William, especially. And, E. J. Clery notes that "the crime of passion which gives rise to the narrative is made not only temporally remote, but also buried within a dense structure of probability and sentiment" (32-33). Illicit passion is at the center of the novel, but its truth has been so shrouded as to make the nature of that passion uncertain. In this sense, Walter Lovel's jealous murder of his cousin's wife may be a handy cover story for the secret (and, at this time, criminal) desire that is shared between several of the male characters in the novel. Wenlock and Markham's heterosexually jealous feud between kin enacts—and parodies—fraternal bonds, which the relations between the homoerotic characters ironically represent in a more idealized form.

Perhaps one of the most direct references to homoerotic relations occurs in a dialogue between William and Edmund. William says, "I swear to you [Edmund], as Jonathan did to David, I beseech heaven to bless me, as my friendship to you shall be steady and inviolable!" (31). The story of Saul's son, Jonathan, and David, regardless of what its actual Biblical import

may be, has a long history dating back to the late medieval period of being a watchword for same-sex erotic partnerships. The covenant between David and Jonathan, which was blessed by God, has been interpreted as a pseudo-marriage between these two men, who were also political rivals for the throne. In Reeve's novel, William's speech also contains a degree of dramatic irony, too, since, unwittingly to him, Edmund is a rival for the family estate, just as David was a rival of Jonathan for the throne. If Edmund is cast as David, he then inhabits the role of the innocent giant-killer, strengthening his self-fashioned image as one that merits a rise in fortune. Thus, even while referring to a widely recognized homoerotic code, the text is employing a pious Biblical allusion as well as setting that allusion ironically against its own narrative.

VI. Double Identities, Doubtful Authorities, Dual Readerships

The various hidden alliances between the men in the novel may also be an allusion to the Hardwicke Act of 1753: "although there had been legislation transforming marriage to a church-regulated sacrament into a state-sanctioned contract, this was the first act, effective January 1, 1754, to invalidate clandestine marriage" (Mandell, 238). Parental authority was required to legitimate a marriage, so that marriage vows exchanged—even with witnesses or with written documentation—outside consent of the father were disregarded. The act was concerned with "securing the legitimate succession of the family estate, by protecting impressionable daughters from fortune hunters or naïve sons from designing women" (Mandell 238-239). Nonetheless, the law disempowered women since previously the church could enforce banns taken under its aegis without the approval of parents. The society of "feminized" gay men in the novel could, on the one hand, depict the clandestine alliances of eighteenth-century "mollies" or, on the other, stand-in for the state of disenfranchised women who had failed to gain parental consent in order to

legitimate their secret marriages. That is, the engagements between men in the novel may represent clandestine and illegitimate marriages among eighteenth-century men and women, especially considering that Reeve, particularly concerned with proto-feminist issues, conspicuously gave women characters little role in this, her most enduring work. However, for this tertiary level of interpretation to exist, one must first accept the secret alliances among the cabal of men as in some way appropriating marriage arrangements.

To substantiate that queer reading, the reader is given several hints in the initial pages describing Sir Philip. First, he "entered into the service of a Greek Emperor" and "took a prisoner… of Greek extraction… which he bound to him to himself by… friendship and gratitude" from whom he had since received "thirty years of… warlike service" (5). Mention of friendship with Greeks here might well be interpreted as code for male anal intercourse, where "warlike service" plays with the familiar classical link between love and war. When Sir Philip eventually returns home, he finds his sister and mother dead, and he must "prove the reality of his claim and the identity of his person" (6). Sir Philip is placed in the same circumstances as Edmund will be, requiring proof of his identity, and like Edmund, he "relies on the testimony of some old servants… after which everything was restored to him" (6). The guarantor of upper-class privilege is ironically lower-class servants in much the way that patrilineal succession depends on the word of women.

We should also be cognizant that at this time identity itself was predicated on one's bloodline, regarded as transferred with the sanguine humoral property that was contained in sperm. But, as there is a notable absence of any mention of Sir Philip's father, the trace of the patrilineal connection has been curiously circumvented, causing Sir Philip's status to depend upon oral accounts given by the lower-class old salts that he supposedly controls. Similarly, the

novel's very first sentence foreshadows the ambiguity not only of identity but its connection with proprietorship and sovereign rule: the story begins in "the minority of Henry the Sixth," (5) in which the young king both does and does not rule the kingdom since various regents and protectors administered authority during this time. The reference frames the entire story as taking place in a time of turmoil, civil war, and the suspension of normal law. Henry the Sixth later went insane, and so he had ambiguous control of his realm over the course of his adult lifetime, as well. Nonetheless, the language of one "restored" to his or her rightful property would probably register to a contemporaneous audience as a sly reference to the disputations taking place over the course of the Restoration period. By reminding her readers of late medieval precedents for litigious conflicts about the crown, Reeve is ironically "normalizing" a state of ambiguous authority, even a state of exception, framing the uncertain conditions of her local narrative in terms of the long-standing political jockeying that was taking place on a national and international level during the late eighteenth century.

This double instability of sovereign authority—in both fictional and historical narratives—is directly aligned with the fictional, extradiegetic presentation of instability in the textual authority of the novel based on the conceit of its deriving from an Old English manuscript. There is a lacuna in the text, in which some mock-editorial hand has added the comment:

> *From this place the characters in the manuscript are effaced by time and damp. Here and there some sentences are legible, but not sufficient to pursue the thread of the story. Mention is made of several actions in which the young men were engaged—that Edmund… attracted the notice of every person of observation… the beginning of the next*

succeeding pages is obliterated: However, we may guess at the beginning of what remains. (23)

"Characters" is an ambiguous term that could describe both the letters as well as the personages in the manuscript. Exactly what fluids have foxed these characters or effaced them with "damp" is left to the imagination of the reader. "Sentences," likewise, could refer to a lexical point or a legal penalty, especially since the text is emphasizing its material and metafictional qualities. At any rate, the legibility of both is problematized: the thread of the storyline disappears in a murky smudge just as sovereign lineage mazes into a semantic blotch. The novel's repeated lacunae, nonetheless, announce themselves as an allegory of reading, having left a tell-tale trail of guesswork for the discerning reader to follow. Admission of the "obliteration" of the manuscript is an unveiling of some hiddenness within the text, and constitutes another theme of Gothic—the problematic materiality of the text and possible censorship of it—that manifests in later writers such as Stevenson and Wilkie Collins. If we must follow a path of dubious guesswork at the beginning, we never can be certain we will get to the bottom of these leavings (or leavings-out). Nonetheless, if we flatter ourselves as persons of observation, we too are entreated to notice how attractive Edmund is, and to discern the quasi-marital overtones of various young men who are "engaged" in this benighted fairy-tale.

Various scribal hands have supposedly created a palimpsest of the text, confusing the issue of authorship; likewise, the parental issue is over-determined as Sir Philip, Baron Fitz-Owen, and the peasant Andrew all claim to be Edmund's surrogate father in various legal, moral, or natural capacities. Edmund negotiates the confusion among these overlapping claims in his social ascendancy, so that even after it is surreptitiously revealed that he is Arthur Lovel's heir,

Sir Philip claims him as his "adopted son" (135) while Baron Fitz-Owen claims him as a legal son through his marriage with his daughter Emma. The narrator refers to these two as Edmund's "two paternal friends" (113), again hinting that they are more akin to "daddies" than normative heterosexual father figures. Edmund asks the Baron Fitz-Owen to "give him a character," meaning to instill in him a proper education, mold his identity, and clarify the cloudy signs by which he is composed; or perhaps to give him a letter of recommendation, though such textual proofs have been shown as possibly forged. Edmund's true self remains a recondite patchwork of interpretation, just as he takes on several aliases throughout the novel. His initial surname Twyford itself already hints at his double nature, perhaps intimating a place where two lines of influence intersect.[2]

Sir Philip is a person of observation, smitten with Edmund on first sight, but also a figure whose desires cause him to overlook facts. He is dumbstruck by the young Edmund when he catches Edmund with Fitz-Owen's sons, "cross bows in their hands, shooting at a mark," an undisguised allusion to being struck with cupid's shaft. Edmund has just won at the prize while Sir Philip, all a-quiver, "fixed his eye upon him with so much attention, that he seemed not to observe his courtesy and address" (13), and then Sir Philip emits a melancholy sigh. Perhaps Sir Philip misses the mark, and fails to perceive Edmund's address, or perhaps Sir Philip only *seems* to neglect Edmund's regard toward him. What that regard is also remains ambiguous, whether "courtesy and address" is a coldly formal greeting or an amorous admiration. Nonetheless, Sir

[2] Just as Edmund himself becomes doubled, severed in twain, as if he were a mirage multiplying in a hall of mirrors, the genre that later became the Gothic tradition has been consistently troubled by doubles: in fact, it was conceived as a double—a genre that could split the difference between fantastical romance and realistic modern novels. This cleavage (both joining and sundering) is evident in the dual prefaces of the novels of both Walpole *and* Reeve. Perhaps, then, it is the superimposition of at least two interpretations within a claustrophobic legal-normative atmosphere which recognizes only one possible outcome that constitutes the spooky action of Gothic narratives. Reeve's narrative succeeds in enacting a sentimental-meritocratic divvying-up of titles, honors, and property at the same time that this is grafted onto a triumphant system of male homoerotic alliances, which covertly act as a foil to the novel's ostensibly sentimental bourgeois values.

Philip has overlooked the social impropriety of adopting an unknown boy (though later we may be tempted to excuse this oversight as due to Sir Philip's recognition on some level that Edmund was Arthur Lovel's son). Immediately, with no further acquaintance, Sir Philip proposes to Fitz-Owen that he will "adopt him [Edmund] for my son, and introduce him into the world as my relation" (15). Again, Sir Philip appears the agent of a possible social forgery. Fitz-Owen's answer—that "I only have one condition to make; that the lad shall have his option; for I would not oblige him to leave my service against his inclination" (16)—sounds more like a benevolent father about to marry off his daughter (except that most romances, of course, are predicated on a tyrannical father who refuses to give his daughter their choice of suitor). The traditional block to hetero-normative romance plots is absent: instead, the resolution of Edmund and Sir Philip's engagement must be reputedly worked-out in terms of a system of primogeniture.

Despite Edmund deciding to stay with Fitz-Owen for the time being, at least, he "press[es] the hand of Sir Philip" and declares that "the name of Sir Philip shall be engraven upon my heart," after which Sir Philip "raise[s] the youth and embrace[s] him" (17). This scene nonetheless echoes the trope of lovers who pledge fidelity to each other and yet quickly find themselves separated by fate, a stock plot mechanism as early as the Greek romances. The pressing of hands becomes a motif in the novel that later transmutes into the holding or joining of hands so this embrace signifies their engagement that foreshadows a later (symbolic) marriage. The name of Sir Philip is taken—engraved like a text—onto Edmund's heart, but also perhaps taken to the grave as if it were a secret, as well. Already the artful Edmund has accepted a stranger's name as his own, recognizing in Sir Philip someone else who is passing. Edmund, in fact, takes on various aliases throughout the novel in order to usurp the title to the house. When he runs away to seek help from Sir Philip, Sir Philip tells Edmund to "assume" the "respectable"

and "proper" surname of "Seagrave" in place of his foster father's name (77). The implication is that his identity has been set adrift: Edmund could be any nameless sailor cruising the open seas, who succumbs to drowning as an unmarked body beyond fathoming. Ironically, though, Edmund recognizes he has nothing but his "pretensions to his name and title" (79). As he states earlier, "my inheritance is all words," (21) and words can easily be fudged, subjected to semantic drift and plagiarism. Names and titles are nothing, after all, but words—yet, in another sense, they represent the whole of class status: marital as well as material gain. Edmund is both criticized and rewarded for his "pretensions," (59) by which ambiguity the text simultaneously illegitimates his assumption of upward mobility and validates his strategy of pretending. A similar play on words can be heard in calling him the "heir presumptive" (80), where Edmund is characterized as both a presumptuous upstart and part of the upper-crust establishment. The difference rest with how we parse the words, and consequently the estates.

One of the most convincing so-called "proofs" of Edmund's legitimacy is the discovery of the family jewels that his foster mother unveils under duress, especially the necklace with a locket on which was "engraved the cypher of Lovel" (54). Here again, where proof appears most incontrovertible, it is actually most ambiguous. The heart is merely covered—if not *a* cover. The name itself, which hints of lover, has been engraved, much like the name Seagrave given Edmund by his lover: the sign on the locket is described not so much as a coat-of-arms as a cypher, a shrouded symbol. It is locked away, buried under multiple significations. Thus, Edmund's clearest piece of evidence for his claim is also the one that is a blank, a zero, or a complex code that invites misinterpretation.

The final nominal proof of Edmund's nobility likewise rests on an unveiling of a literal skeleton in a closet, as if he gives away a shameful secret at the same time that he takes the

castle. Edmund's ultimate disclosure, in fact, comes about through Oswald, the priest, who confesses:

> I earnestly desired him to let me be with him on the second night, to which he consented reluctantly… we went down stairs together, I saw him open the fatal closet, I heard groans that pierced me to the heart… I found a seal engraven with the arms of Lovel upon it. (105)

Oswald is ostensibly not describing a sexual tryst with Edmund, only a secret night spent in the castle's closed-off bedroom where they discovered the Lovel arms. This passage echoes the name of Seagrave, referring back to how Edmund engraved Sir Philip's name in his heart, as homoerotic desires are more likely the "fatal" secret of the novel. The arms that get manipulated as proof are also troped as the long-arm of the law, the invisible hand of providence, and the hands of pseudo-marriage proposals as the novel's climax comes full circle with a ceremonial ring of hands—if not rings on hands—wherein several male characters embrace each other in turn (126-127).

The upshot of this is that the Gothic was conceived in queerness, much like Edmund himself, having a plural and shifty lineage of at least two "fathers," since Gothic claims to be the heir of the genres of romance *and* realism, simultaneously representing the phantasmal and the factual, the unnatural with the naturalistic. By conjoining tropes of epic romance quests with their male alliances and the realist sentimental novel of domestic love plots, Reeve produces a generic cleavage in which queer desires may find expression. E.J. Clery remarks that the *Old English Baron* is "difficult to know how to read today" (30). Even during its own time, some—

such as Walpole—denounced it because it seemed banal and predictable while others praised it profusely and confessed it had caused them to weep. "It is clear," writes Clery, Reeve "sought to engage readers on multiple levels, through the marvelous, the probable, and the sentimental" (31). It also seems clear that her somewhat banal, predictable, and altogether hetero-normative narrative of a fallen house that is rectified to its legitimate heir contains buried within it a very different story of how a lower-class imposter can, by forming a network of male alliances, usurp the aristocratic title and estate. Ruth Perry notes that in the novel:

> Pledges of obedience are obsessively repeated… But these emotionally laden protestations of eternal loyalty, made by servants to masters, sons to fathers and fathers to sons, brothers to brothers and cousins to cousins, are all guaranteed by the legalistic recording of Edmund's discoveries and reversals… The changes revealed by dreams and ghostly visitations must be bureaucratically registered to be effective…. The mixture of conventions in this novel, the way it begins as Gothic romance and ends with realistic legal consequences, can be read as the narrative of one kind of family dissolving into another. Edmund's champions begin by vowing fealty to him, but by the end of the novel they are calculating damages, witnessing testamentary documents, and appealing to the government for bureaucratic writs. (116-117)

What Perry does not point out is that the obsessive pledges of allegiance shared among so many males are rarely exchanged by those already recognized as authorities. Instead, the vows are either exchanged among homosocial male groups that are disempowered (priest, servant, younger brother, peasant; Sir Philip, though noble, can be classed as an outsider and ambiguous

friend-of-the-family) or are potentially misleading oaths made by lower-class men toward their aristocratic betters. Thus, the strange change that Perry notices in the novel—from romance to account book—signals how this secret fraternity of men plots to assimilate and rise in an increasingly bureaucratic society through such strategies as solidarity, legal quibbles, and passing. Bound hand in hand, they protect themselves from the arm of the law even as they grasp aristocratic estates and privilege.

Having It Both Ways: Queer Quixoticism in *Northanger Abbey*

Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* represents the teleology of its generic scripts as fulfilling the narrative desires of its readers. Yet, because the novel fuses the genres of Gothic romance and realist novel, those desires are revealed as contingent. The novel nonetheless obliges its "contract" with the reader by performing the conventions of both the genres of which it partakes. Henry's broken promises thereby signal a threatening disruption since the central "law" of the novel is to live up to one's own promises. Catherine and the novel itself meet the expectations they create; however, they also disavow those expectations by distorting available social and generic scripts. The terrors of the Gothic romance are transposed onto the realist domestic scene to expose an insidious, patriarchal oppression, which induces the anxiety evident in both genres, whether as a paranoia against rapists and murderers or as a fear of monsters and ghosts. Against this patriarchal oppression, however, the novel recognizes the possibilities and limitations of sororial love through the figure of the missing mother. The novel's ending, in hastening so rapidly and perfunctorily to its foregone conclusion, raises questions about the

suitability of its various partners as well as the desires of its readers and the functions of narrative itself.

I. Readers Implored and Readers Implied

Gothic novels often foreground their quixoticism as characters, readers, and characters that *are* readers project what they already want to read onto various social and textual screens. In *Northanger Abbey*, Austen frames her narrative against her narratee's expectations of romantic and Gothic conventions: in doing so, she superimposes the code of Gothic romance onto the code of the realistic novel of the commonplace. Ashley Tauchert writes, "Austen's narratives make heterosexual union a fundamental desire for the readers of her work" (28). Though the inevitability of marriage may be a truth universally acknowledged within Austen's plots, considerable irony is expressed about the desires that hasten readers and characters alike to such conclusions. Tauchert points out the "tension between the 'formulaic'—and hence narratively inevitable—conclusion and the 'realist' obstacles which appear to delay its coming" in *Northanger Abbey* (39) Tauchert's analysis, though, sets up a false dichotomy since not only are many of the obstacles in Catherine's way to matrimony created by her own gothic fancy (and the narratee's demands to have the conventions of the romance genre fulfilled, which include reversals, delays, misunderstandings, and awakenings), but realism, as a literary genre, is no less beholden to conventions and formulas than romance. Rather, the tension, which Tauchert rightly apprehends, has a different source: Austen's narrator in *Northanger Abbey* addresses a hetero-normative narratee who desires a conventionally romantic marriage plot while undercutting this address with language that creates a queer implied reader who has a skeptical—or, conversely, a knowingly indulgent—relationship to the narratee's desires.

Akin to my own description of a decided rift between the narratee and the implied reader, Tara Ghoshal Wallace claims that *Northanger Abbey* initially posits two readers, a naïve reader who expects the clichéd trappings of Gothic romance and a sophisticated reader who "knows a parody when he sees one" (262). Nonetheless, she says, the novel disorients its readers by making them become participants in constructing the story, and ultimately asks them to reject not only the mawkish bromides of romance, the unimaginative bathos of realism, and the misplaced absurdity of Gothic fantasy, but the novel's own distorting parodic discourse, as well, since "each stance is trapped within its own self-created limitations" (270). The limitations of these different forms and formulas, however, are only shown through a self-parody that appropriates their narrative codes and assumptions, inverting and juxtaposing them in order to convey how each is false even while fulfilling all their generic scripts. Though Wallace seems to hope the "ideal" reader will learn to stand free from all these discourses just as Catherine supposedly does at the end, it is nonetheless important that the queer implied reader recognizes the pleasure afforded by dutifully performing the promises of these different scripts, albeit in a more self-conscious register. After all, these various scripts are not entirely abandoned over the course of the novel, but embraced and fulfilled with an irony that makes the reader a more knowing participant in their moral (or, one might say ideological) possibilities and limitations.

Actual readers are, of course, free to read the novel however they want, many choosing to identify with the narratee and constructing a "hetero-plot" that registers the narrator's irony as directed principally against the excesses of Radcliffean Gothic fantasy while overlooking (or dismissing) the queer tendencies of Austen's characters. Claudia L. Johnson has described the formation of the academic study of the novel, for which Austen was essential, as one where academic critics such as Wayne Booth, Lionel Trilling, and F. R. Leavis vituperated against what

they characterized as the Janeites' queer "gossip," which emphasized Austen's skeptical comedy of manners, so as to discipline her novels into robust heterosexual terms that emphasized heterosexual desire and the marriage plot. Recovering a previous queer readership, Claudia L. Johnson shows that queer interpretations of Austen were far more common previous to her inscription into the academic canon by straight male critics, so that the more recent outrages at new queer readings of Austen actually ignore a longer and more established reception history. There had been an appreciative cult of queer admirers of Austen's novels—including E. M. Forster, Lord David Cecil, Caroline Spurgeon, and A. C. Bradley, a cult that extends into present day admirers such as Leo Bersani and D. A. Miller—who have long been forgotten by establishment discourses in order to construct a hetero-normative version of Austen based on her narratives' drive toward marriage rather than emphasizing those elements in her work that resist or ironize that very impulse. Johnson writes that "the heteronormativity of Austen seems as obvious to Rosenblatt, Kimball, and outraged readers of the *LRB* [*London Review of Books*] as her queerness does to Castle, Bersani, and" others such as Sedgwick (146). But these outraged readers have unknowingly absorbed the moral criticism whose project it was to unkink and straighten out Austen's novels to make them fit a particular academic history of the novel, deliberately marginalizing pleasures derived from Austen's other communities of interpreters.

Those readers, though, who acknowledge the narrator's queer undertone of irony about the formal requirements of the romance genre, which the narrator nonetheless participates in, are also in a position to appreciate how the various characters deviate from heterosexual norms despite ostensibly fulfilling them in many ways, including, ultimately, traditional matrimony. Indeed, *Northanger Abbey* is structured around innumerable "engagements," a word which continually arises in the text. Just as Catherine seeks to assiduously uphold her promises against

events that would frustrate her will, and is often given what has been promised her with a decided twist, the narrator's commentary highlights the implicit social contract of genre itself, by which readers are kept engaged as much by the narrative's subtle straying from conventions as by its adhering to them with fidelity.

II. Narrative Codes and Contracts

Any reader must read with, and possibly against, unspoken codes in the text: the different conventions, expectations, and discourses established by the conjunction of textual patterns and available interpretive (and social) norms, including genre. Genres, at least narrative genres, are schemas of ordering and prioritizing events, characters, plots, and temporalities. They are not conceptually empty or innocent; they come laden with—one might almost say they *are*—a host of assumptions. Ascriptions of genre, then, can reshape the text to comport with pre-established assumptions, just as one's system of values may give shape the interpretation of one's reading. It is the way that a particular narrative's fulfills or deviates from such narrative codes that often produces a reader's feelings of inevitability or surprise. Unlike many parodies, which oppose one generic or evaluative code to ridicule, invert, or supplant another code within the text, *Northanger Abbey* uses the juxtaposition of multiple narrative codes—Gothic romance and realist novel, as well as queer and hetero-normative registers of discourse—to show the conventional and performative nature of each, demonstrating how the emerging conventions of the realist novel is co-implicated with its more romantic, Gothic, and quixotic forebears. That is to say, *Northanger Abbey* acts as a metafiction that not only critiques the conventions of the Gothic novel, but also ironically utilizes those same conventions in a *self*-parody. To vastly oversimplify, self-parody, unlike parody, does not appropriate the tropes of some "other" source

to highlight its critical difference from that source, but rather foregrounds the conventions it obeys or violates to critique or recontextualize its *own* usage of those tropes. In doing so, the novel highlights, somewhat paradoxically, its difference from itself. By this I mean that the novel distances itself from the conventions it nonetheless performs in much the same way that Catherine and Henry recognize the disparity between the social roles they play and the desires they wish to express.

Importantly, self-parody takes multiple and parallel forms in *Northanger Abbey*; besides the quixotic self-parody of the Gothic, which in turn highlights the conventionality of the realist novel, Austen's work offers a queer self-parody of its main protagonists, Catherine Morland and Henry Tilney. The discourse of *Northanger Abbey* insistently straddles the line between that which goes without saying and that which cannot be spoken. As even Harry Shaw—a critic with commitments derived from Booth and Trilling—acknowledges, albeit with some reservations:

> I tried to identify clearings, areas of freedom in the interstices of [Austen's] works that promote play with the systems, aesthetic and social, that inform them. I sometimes found them in unlikely places—for instance, in the (very mild, very tentative) female impersonation of Henry Tilney. (206)

I am urging a less tepid, a more full-blooded, embrace of Tilney's performance of "drag" along with a recognition of Catherine's queer potential, as well. Queer self-parody and quixotic self-parody mutually inform each other throughout *Northanger Abbey* since the norms and conventions enforced by proscriptive gender roles produce a certain narrative teleology, a "hetero-narrative," which typically ends in the happy marriage and the female heroine's class

ascension. Both the subtextual, queer counter-narrative and the meta-textual, quixotic interpolation of Gothic materials offer a self-parody of the interpretation of the novel as a hetero-narrative, a romantic commedia. The ending of *Northanger Abbey*, for example, gives us the "inevitable" hetero-normative satisfactions of marriage even while ironically admitting that they are a "given," a mere conventionality. In so doing, Austen's narrator offers a sly and seductive wink at the contingency rather than the naturalness of such norms, much like Tilney when he plays along with the social drama while tellingly letting his mask slip. The difference between Henry Tilney and John Thorpe, as between the narrators in Austen and Radcliffe, is not between realism and artifice or substance and pretension. Rather, the difference depends on the dramatic style they employ: while Thorpe attempts to conceal his social climbing through an opportunistic masquerade, Tilney, like Austen's narrator, employs an alienation effect in which he assiduously fulfills all his social expectations while insouciantly showing them for false.

Tilney, for example, insistently likens a dancing partner's promise to a marriage contract: "We have entered into a contract of mutual agreement," he tells Catherine, "for the space of an evening, and all our agreeableness belongs solely to each other for that time" (64). While Catherine objects to the likening a dance to a marriage—probably because of the difference in solemnity between the two terms, Tilney's analogy shows not only the more serious nature of an engagement to dance, but also the more frivolous side of marriage, which he views as little more than a prolonged "dance" between committed partners. The contractual nature of marriage is emphasized and then put on a level with one's other social obligations. Henry's behavior thus blurs the line between the appropriate responses and the appropriated ones; his obedience to a code of chivalry can seem both genteel and decorous while also seeming as empty as a suit (whether of muslin or armor) that may be put on and off. Michael Kramp writes, "Henry

recognizes the artifice involved in the genteel code of manners that accompanies this archaic ideal of male sexuality," (47) recalling the role of "the late eighteenth-century archetype of the philosophical advisor," though *Northanger Abbey* is "also informed by… texts [which] strongly ridicule such a rational man" (43-44). Henry's metaphor implicitly questions the ontological status of marriage as a rite higher up the chain of being than a dance, yet his point may be that those who do not honor their smaller social responsibilities should not be trusted to be faithful to their larger ones.

By displacing the fundamental value of marriage, though, Tilney subverts the ends of traditional romance, both as a sexual and generic teleology. The performance of one's duties in regard to wedlock, as in regard to many other duties for Tilney, is a performance, in both the theatrical and contractual senses of the word: meeting one's social contracts is choreographed into a spectacle. Contrariwise, Tilney's comparison obviously foreshadows his marriage to Catherine. His comment may be a witty hint to her that he hopes she accepts (and keeps) his engagement to dance as she will her promise of marital fidelity; if Catherine fails to take his comment in this light, certainly most readers can see the dramatic irony. Fewer readers are likely to notice, though, that the comparison of different engagements Tilney uses may also apply to the novelist's generic contract with her reader. The reader engages the novel for its agreeableness—the novel must *be* engaging by following through on the expectations it sets up. The courtship between reader and narrator partakes in some of the disequilibrium of traditional marriage proposals. In this way, Tilney's remarks to Catherine about the dance can also be taken as meta-commentary about readerly engagement; while one is not married to a book, one is requested to give it one's undivided attention for the space of an evening.

But, if the reader's attentions are to be rewarded, then the book, too, must fulfill certain (largely generic) obligations. The genre of *Northanger Abbey* has repeatedly been regarded as a parody of Gothic. But Austen actually appropriates Radcliffe's technique of explaining the seemingly supernatural or monstrous phenomena in her work in rationalist terms. After all, Catherine projects her fears onto her surroundings, only retroactively to have those fears dispelled by empirical facts. The main difference between an Emily St. Aubert and a Catherine Morland, however, is the dramatic irony of the implied reader's position. Radcliffe's poetic conjurations require the reader to willing indulge their suspension of disbelief, becoming anxious not only *for* but *along with* her protagonists. Thus, when the explanation of the narrative occurs near the end of a Radcliffe Gothic, reconfiguring the events in the language of rationalist discourse and expectations, the reader may feel cheated: the reader had accepted the more fantastical nature of Radcliffe's diegetic world. Realistic expectations had been set aside when entering the narrative frame; yet, just before exiting that frame, readers are told that the realistic expectations they apply to the real world have also applied to the novelistic world all along. It is not that Radcliffe's reader was naïve, but that the text set up expectations about the laws of its fictional world which it did not fulfill. Radcliffe's reader was therefore imposed upon. Catherine's naiveté, by contrast, is more apparent to readers from the outset: her interpretation of events as Gothic occurrences is not shared by the reader, but is viewed instead as her quixoticism. When the events are given rational explanations, readers should not feel duped. In this way, Austen's novel obeys the contracts it establishes.

III. Huffy Henry Breaks His Promise

Likewise, the utmost "law" in *Northanger Abbey* is the law that one creates oneself through one's own promises—to break off a prior engagement is to demonstrate that one's character is untrustworthy, vicious, or even criminal. Isabella reneges on her engagement to James, John Thorpe forces Catherine to break her engagement to see Eleanor, General Tilney abruptly takes back his hospitality to Catherine, and Frederick Tilney rescinds his match with Isabella. When Eleanor must back out of her invitation for Catherine to stay longer at the estate, it is because of her father; likewise, when Catherine fails to meet her appointment with Eleanor, John Thorpe's lies and forceful kidnapping have prevented her. Male power tyrannizes over the will of females causing them to break contracts they have gone out of their way to attempt to fulfill. A woman, owned by either her father or husband—and subjected to force, lies, and manipulation in a patriarchal society—fails to be a sufficiently free agent. The code of chivalry, which ostensibly had been designed to protect female "honor," is construed to prevent virtuous women from honoring the contracts they have engaged.

What to make then, of Henry's assertion that he broke his promise to read the rest of *Udolpho* to Eleanor? His remarks are framed by a discussion in which Henry seeks to prove to Catherine that he is a devoted reader of novels. Henry says:

> "Thank you, Eleanor—a most honorable testimony. You see, Miss Morland, the injustice of your suspicions. Here was I, in my eagerness to get on, refusing to wait only five minutes for my sister, breaking the promise I had made of reading it aloud, and keeping her in suspense at a most interesting part, by running away with the volume, which, you are to observe, was her own, particularly her own. I am proud when I reflect on it, and I think it must establish me in your good opinion." (90)

Tilney flaunts his own bad behavior, pretending that a breach of contract should ironically put him in Catherine's good graces. Like Radcliffe, then, Tilney breaks his promise; he may think, perhaps, that this will make him seem superior, as Radcliffe's narrator may withhold information to assert a superior position than her readers. Really, however, Tilney and Radcliffe alike hoodwink their audience. Even if his remarks are taken tongue-in-cheek, he still admits to being a "booknapper," as if his carrying the volume away into the garden were acting out *Udolpho*'s fantasy of Montoni abducting Emily to some far-flung locale. The phrase "running away" seems redolent of his passions running away from him, but also of Henry running away from his responsibilities. The Henry who equated a dance proposal with a marriage proposal because they are both serious moral obligations has been exchanged for the Henry who sees marriage as essentially a prolonged if still frivolous gambol. Henry is not the rational philosophical advisor that he sometimes pretends to be, his reading inducing a desire in him to reenact its narrative, showing that he has tendencies to Gothic, queer, and quixotic excess. The book, moreover, had been "particularly" Eleanor's own, likening it to a betrothed lover, whom Henry steals for his own selfish purposes. In this sense, Henry may hint that he wishes to "run away" with Catherine, who is not his particular guest, but rather Eleanor's.

The passionate nature of reading causes Henry to forget himself and tends to corrupt his façade of gallantry. He remarks that while he read *Udolpho* his "hair [was] standing on end the whole time," (90) which Joseph Litvak discerns as not just a sign of terror or titillation, but a metonymic reference to an erection (51-52). Henry, however, seems unaware of just how far the Gothic tales have carried him away from his rational-seeming demeanor since a little later he laughs, interrupting a conversation between Catherine and Eleanor, saying, "I will prove myself

a man, no less by the generosity of my soul than the clearness of my head" (95). Eleanor had mistaken the newest Gothic story Catherine had been describing for actual events taking place in London; Henry anxiously asserts his masculinity, claiming that he can clear up their confusion between fiction and reality. His supposed "proof" of masculinity, though, consists of a disparagement of women. He says:

> "I have no patience with such of my sex as disdain to let themselves down to the comprehension of yours. Perhaps the abilities of women are neither sound nor acute—neither vigorous nor keen. Perhaps they may want observation, discernment, judgment, fire, genius, wit." (95)

He later "forgives" Eleanor for her "stupidity" and refuses to take back his misogynistic comments (96). Of course, not only are Radcliffe and Austen women who have more judgment, fire, and wit than Tilney, but, ironically, his sister Eleanor comes off as the more reasonable one here, as opposed to Henry's hot-headed put-downs and showing-off.

IV. Bending the Script

Tilney, despite—or rather *because*—of his usually droll performative reserve, is self-conscious of performing his role as the novelistic hero: when he first encounters Catherine, he rehearses the properly gallant things to say, repeating conventional questions and responses in an archly ingratiating manner. Tilney, in projecting himself as the love interest in a romance, is equally as quixotic as Catherine, reading his own life against the innumerable Gothic novels he has read, as well. Tilney slips between a "set smile and affectedly softening his voice… with a

simpering air" to "his natural tone" (19). In fact, Tilney goes so far as to call *himself* "queer," and Catherine almost calls him so, similarly to how she later labels herself as "odd" (20, 22). Furthermore, Tilney is marked by his foppish discernment of fashion, which is put in relief by Mrs. Allen's quaint observation that "Men [that is, presumably, *real* men] take so little notice of those things" (21-22). But even more than Tilney's interest in fashion, he is "outed" as a result of confessing his inordinate devotion to Gothic novels, which he claims surpasses Catherine's. Tilney boasts:

> "Do not imagine you can cope with me in a knowledge of Julias and Louisas. If we proceed to particulars, and engage in the never-ceasing inquiry of 'Have you read this?' and 'Have you read that?' I shall soon leave you far behind me as—what shall I say?—I want an appropriate simile—as far as your friend Emily herself left poor Valancourt when she went with her aunt into Italy. Consider how many years I have the start of you. I had entered on my studies at Oxford while you were a good little girl working your sampler at home." (91)

His one-upmanship and condescension, to the point of infantilizing Catherine, marks him as anxious to assert the prerogatives of masculine privilege even in the female-centric realm of romance novel reading. Joseph Litvak astutely points out, "Henry… has been exhibiting such 'imperfections' from the outset, revealing himself, to the suspicious gaze, not as the Gothic hero to his father's Gothic villain, but as the practitioner of a more systematically euphemized, more suavely generalized, and thus more conveniently misrecognized male sadism than that directed against Catherine by his rather too anxiously and ineptly malevolent parent" (36). Ironically, his

giving himself airs about reading so many Gothics proves that he is far from the novelistic hero he thinks he is. To "engage" one another about literature has been rendered by Henry as a bellicose game of name-dropping. In fact, his anxiety becomes so acute that he loses his usual suave command of language and cannot find an appropriate simile until he resorts to one gained by reading Gothic novels, demonstrating his own irrational, self-absorbed contamination by books, his own quixotic points of reference.

Perhaps the ultimate irony of Henry's self-presentation of rationality is the fact that he inadvertently succumbs to the very love-plot that he has fostered in Catherine. After all, rather late in the book, the narrator confides that:

> I must confess that his affection originated in nothing better than gratitude, or, in other words, that a persuasion of her partiality for him had been the only cause of giving her serious thought…. It is a new circumstance in romance, I acknowledge, and dreadfully derogatory to the dignity of an heroine's dignity." (204)

Catherine gets dragged through the mud once again, still unable to fulfill her role as storybook heroine even at her moment of greatest felicity. Henry is shown as less than ideal, too—he has been beguiled by his own stories and performances. He goaded Catherine with an account of how she would likely write down their initial meeting in her journal, he teased her with Gothic tales of the estate, and he hinted to her about the misleading flirtation between Captain Tilney and Isabella. If Henry wanted to appear charming, then he succeeded not only in charming Catherine but in putting himself under a spell, too. Susan Morgan says that while Henry's brother, Captain Tilney, may be the roué, Henry also delights to "play the wit, the jaded dandy,

the Gothic storyteller" (114). Perhaps the difference is that Henry is not the simpering male charmer who uses his gifts to deceive others—his gifts have succeeded, instead, in deceiving himself.

Likewise, the course of Catherine's intellectual development is more sidelong than straight, more athwart than linear. The beginning chapters of the novel, for example, contrast the narratee's expectations for a beautiful, accomplished heroine with the hoydenish, clumsy, and at times simple character of Catherine. Terry Castle remarks: "If Catherine, Austen's antiheroine, is defined by a series of 'no's,' 'not's,' 'neither's,' and 'nor's,' the story Austen tells about her is also fraught with negatives" (25). With her litany of so many "no's," one might think the lady doth protest too much. Contrary to Castle, who views the narrator's insistent "no's" as a "recall-and-displace technique" (28), which substitutes Austen's own circumscribed milieu for the foreign Radcliffean Gothic and, more importantly, corrects the quixotic vision of literature's relationship to life through a more realist, if class-bound and provincial, version, the "no's" can be heard as the narrator's defiance of the hegemony of patriarchal laws and conventions—a hegemony that renders her powerless at times to even voice her opposition to it. After all, not only in the Gothic tradition, but in the eighteenth-century realist tradition of the novel (including in many works by Richardson, Defoe, and Burney) some form of literal or metaphorical rape often plays a substantial, though sometimes satirized, role in the narrative. Against *both* these traditions, then, Catherine struggles to define herself as an autonomous agent who lives up to her own promise and honors her own promises.

Nevertheless, both realist and Gothic conventions are not only mocked, but fulfilled in the course of the novel. Before puberty, Catherine prefers a romp in the mud to her studies; after puberty, she is "in training for a heroine… [and] read all such works as heroines must read" (11).

Some readers, however, may very well like Catherine for her pluck and gumption, qualities she never quite loses, even if they make her naïve or gauche. Indeed, it is her willingness to trudge through dirt and rain to keep her appointments and promises that proves her mettle later in the novel when she visits Henry's sister Eleanor, wherein the implied reader's sympathy is elicited for Catherine's concern that social obligations should outweigh social appearances. If Catherine's Ur-impishness disregards gender norms, her failed "training" is no less queer since it consists of amassing an assortment of romantic commonplaces to be employed on various occasions, which shows how a traditional heroine's speech and behavior is nothing other than a pastiche of quotations. Catherine's education, then, is presented as learning to operate a citational matrix, applying ready-made lines and gestures to suit a social code. But, unlike Isabella or even Henry Tilney, Catherine never successfully corsets herself into the standard fashions and phrases, allowing some defiant muffin-top to peak out. By repeatedly highlighting her failure to fulfill the role of a heroine, the narrator marks Catherine's distance from hetero-normative ideals of femininity; she never quite fits.

Reading for Catherine is pointedly a "rehearsal" of the conventions she hopes to later perform in life (and which the narratee expects to be met in the unfolding of the novel's plot). Austen's meta-fictional irony cuts both ways since it acts to make the pretensions of the Gothic *and* the "heroine" Catherine (who at first fails to fulfill even "realist" conventions) look slightly ridiculous. Over the course of the story, however, Catherine—like the reader of Austen as opposed to Radcliffe—is able to inhabit the generic trappings of the Gothic heroine while avoiding being entrapped by them. Like Tilney, who always appears to say the correct thing but does so with an air of ironic *noblesse oblige* between insouciant asides, the narrator offers us a

Catherine who is a self-parody, ironically playing out a plot of Gothic while such an intrigue seems simultaneously dashed.

Austen's novel manages to perform all of the promises given by its plural genres. Yet, by offering promises based on both domesticated realist and romance Gothic traditions, the fulfillment of its promises also entails some interesting deviations from them. On the one hand, the novel reenacts Radcliffe's rationalist Gothic without misleading the reader; on the other hand, because the empirical assumptions of its diegetic universe are never in question for the reader, the novel maintains its status as a realist novel at the same time. Yet, the terrors invoked by the Gothic genre are not entirely chimerical; rather, they are transposed onto the novelistic realist world, a world in which voluntary spies and potential rapists lurk everywhere, a situation which itself may be an irrational paranoia. Nonetheless, such paranoia may be based on a true underlying structural oppression in society; but, if so, then the terrors of Gothic and the paranoia induced by realist novels are just representing this oppression differently. Both genres may correspond, in fact, to a similar affective, experiential quality about the real world. This transposition of the genres, then, has the effect of breaking the spell of both genres, showing their conventionality. After all, few of us want a story to be entirely predictable—many readers want narrative patterns disrupted, which keeps us alert, but disrupted in ways that provide some coherence with the expectations the text already established rather than a flagrant disregard of those expectations. As Austen fulfills yet deviates from her adopted genres, so, too, Catherine and Henry attempt to fulfill the social scripts available to them while recognizing that the prescriptive norms embedded in such scripts may not comport with their desires. They therefore perform these social scripts with an ironic difference, markedly queer because they distort and

de-essentialize the roles that others assume come "natural" to them, treating them in a citational manner—calling attention to them *as* scripts.

V. Transposition of Generic Conventions: Murderous Fathers and the Oppressive Patriarchy

Where a Gothic revelation seems averted in the novel, a far more troubling realist one is exposed. Tilney indignantly responds to Catherine's misplaced suspicions about his father, General Tilney, being a murderer. His dismissal of her Gothic fancies nonetheless invokes many of the very causes of Catherine's delusion in his own defense of the only "correct" view:

> If I understand you rightly, you had formed a surmise of such horror as I have hardly words to— Dear Miss Morland, consider the dreadful nature of the suspicions you have entertained. What have you been judging from? Remember the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English, that we are Christians… Does our education prepare us for such atrocities? Do our laws connive at them? Could they be perpetrated without being known, in a country like this, where social and literary intercourse is on such a footing, where every man is surrounded by a neighborhood of voluntary spies, and where roads and newspapers lay everything open? Dearest Miss Morland, what ideas have you been admitting? (165)

It is, indeed, Catherine's "education," consisting largely in her reading of novels, produced by the "social and literary intercourse" of England, which forms the foundation she has been judging from. Tilney unwittingly replaces her personal nightmare of the General being a

murderer with the more general nightmare of a whole army of "voluntary spies" in a country where nothing is private. Perhaps what Tilney can hardly speak of here—the horrors of a domestic tyrant—is not nearly as violent as what he has a superfluity of words to express, the horror of a panoptic society with tyranny omnipresent. His scolding tirade represses the image of paternal violence even as his discourse inadvertently re-enacts its authority. His speech also betrays the fact that not all can be "open" if Catherine is to trust him to keep her suspicions secret. His self-sure diatribe depends frankly on a national and religious provincialism that jingoistically reasons that *it can't happen here*—we're "English" and "Christian," not Italian and Catholic.

Furthermore, if Tilney's objections displace Catherine's Gothic fantasy about the General, we are still confronted by the General's actual tyranny during his subsequent mercenary dismissal of Catherine from the house. Just as the General has most likely literally killed people in battle, his abrupt banishment of Catherine symbolically orphans his would-be daughter-in-law, tossing her defenseless into the wilderness to meet her fate "without even the means of getting home" (192). The narrator, in fact, comments "that in suspecting General Tilney of either murder or shutting up his wife, [Catherine] had scarcely sinned against his character, or magnified his cruelty" (207). As Terry Castle notes, "The true climax of *Northanger Abbey* comes about not when Catherine realizes she has been mistaken about General Tilney, but at the moment at which (to put it as paradoxically as Austen does) she realizes that she has not" (31). The novel's structure transposes Catherine's Gothic nightmare onto her now clear-as-day reality, substituting the picture of a monstrous outlaw for a vision of masculine oppression, which is, perhaps, more terrifying in that it hits closer to home. General Tilney ironically wants Catherine to tour his

prized gardens—a traditional symbol of wedded bliss—whereas in reality he is a voracious and finicky consumer, insisting that each meal be cooked exactly to his liking.

Likewise, the discovery that Catherine makes of the "collection of washing-bills" (210) and other assorted papers in the secret cabinet, which she later dismisses as banal, can—upon reevaluation—take on ominous meanings. Jillian Heydt-Stevenson astutely notes:

> Within the context of the novel, the subjects of these financial accounts—clothes, letters, and horses—carry a thematic and psychosexual significance in that they replicate in miniature the topics of conversation and plot throughout the narrative. These are matters that in themselves carry a real, though subtle threat: Mrs. Allen too distracted by her clothes to be a fit guardian; John Thorpe mistreating his horses and whisking Catherine away against her will; letters arriving with news of Isabella's betrayal. (130)

Again, what fails at the fantastical register to terrify comes back to indicate a more insidious menace in the realist mode. This "dirty laundry" also happens to belong to the viscount, the so-called "most charming young man in the world," (210) as it turns out, whom Eleanor ends up marrying. Indeed, it is the *only* fact that we learn about him. The narrator self-consciously states that "the rules of composition forbid" her from revealing any other details "of a character not connected to my fable" (210). Left there by a "negligent servant" (210), the bills become a trace of a potentially sinister discrepancy. Negligence, dirty linen, bills of account—all of these seem to contradict the facile superlative of the title "the most charming young man in the world." The narrator, by offering this one surreptitious fact, not only risks violating the "rule" of introducing an extraneous character into her narrative late in the game, but also hints at a possible disruption

of that narrative since the supposedly happy ending, which the novel is hastening toward at breakneck speed, depends on this strange figure's having no skeletons in his closet. Given that the narrator explicitly leaves it up to her reader to fill in the blank about this mysterious character, some readers may recall that Catherine earlier thought "that [General Tilney] was a perfectly agreeable, and good natured, and altogether a very charming man, did not admit of doubt" (107). In other words, the reader—like Catherine—may have learned not to be so credulous about what books seem to say, and to judge that this so-called charming man may very well be less than perfectly amiable.

The novel insinuates the threat of male violence in both overt and symbolic fashion. Very early on in the novel, Mrs. Allen "congratulated herself. . . on having preserved her gown from injury," saying, "it would have been very shocking to have it torn" and, a little later, "one gets so tumbled in such a crowd! How is my head, my dear? Somebody gave me a push that has hurt it, I am afraid (16-17). Preserving her gown becomes akin to preserving her maidenhood, and she is afraid her headgear—or her maidenhead—might have damaged their delicate fabric when she had been given a push in such a crowd. As Heydt-Stevenson remarks, Mrs. Allen fantasizes "her own ravishment through the fears she expresses about the ripping of her clothes" (108). Here, the transposition may be seen as going in the other direction. The fashionable Bath ballroom of realist "fantasy" has been symbolically transposed into a Gothic's bodice-ripping mob. In this light, the charming young man's washing-bills may allude to another case where clothes are getting "tumbled" and slightly "torn," some hint of sexual dirty laundry.

Also very early in the novel, Mrs. Morland is said to know "so little of lords and baronets, that she entertained no notion of their general mischievousness, and was wholly unsuspicious of danger to her daughter from their machinations" (13). One might suppose

charming viscounts, as well, would arouse suspicions of their mischievousness from those more knowledgeable than Mrs. Morland. The implied reader presumably knows—from realist novels such as *Clarissa* or *Evelina* as much as any Gothic—that lords and viscounts are dangerous to young ladies. Mrs. Morland urges her daughter to "keep some account of the money you spend; I will give you this book on purpose" (14). That is the last we hear of Catherine's account book because she continues to be too enraptured by books of another kind. Nevertheless, the bills she discovers in the cabinet act as an ironic return of the repressed, a palpable reminder of the account book she should have been tallying all along. The bills she discovers, moreover, hint at the imprisoning economic system in which women were legally treated as—and bartered for—property on the marriage market; the seemingly benign receipts, then, turn into a veritable laundry list of forms of oppression. Specifically, they signify the mercantile and mercenary fate to which General Tilney holds her, until the mysterious viscount comes to settle the account by marrying Eleanor.

VI. Missing Mothers

While General Tilney is Catherine's surrogate father-figure, albeit a tyrannical one, Mrs. Allen is Catherine's stand-in mother-figure, inattentive and egocentric. Thus, Catherine is an abandoned child—doubly abandoned in that her true parents, the Morlands, have ignored her and left her astray in the world while the guardians she adopts have proven inadequate to secure her welfare. It is possible, then, that Catherine's Gothic fantasy of General Tilney's crime may be her own projected wish of wanting to kill her mother, in order to enact unconscious revenge on her negligent parents. Alternatively, her matricidal fantasy may represent her guilt at the dawning realization that she will eliminate her own potential as a mother, opting out of such a

hetero-normative role. In some sense, it may be both: even as Catherine searches the forbidden recesses of the house for the ideal mother, which she never had, she is convinced that the mother, which she could become, has already been starved or strangled. It is also a telling detail that the portrait of the matriarch of the Tilney clan hangs in Eleanor's bed-chamber (151) since Eleanor herself ultimately takes on an approximately maternal role for Catherine.

When Catherine eventually returns home, she has been disabused of her notions to rely on authorities—whether a parent's suggestions or fiction's—enough to ignore Mrs. Morland's advice to read an essay in *The Mirror*. The essay, Mrs. Morland says, is "about young girls that have been spoilt for home by great acquaintance" (202). Mrs. Morland overlooks the fact that Catherine has very nearly been ruined by her acquaintances *at* her home. As Deborah D. Rogers states, "The mother of ten children, Mrs. Morland, is relegated to a minor role, all but ignoring Catherine" (67). Since "her time was so much occupied in lying-in and teaching the little ones… her eldest daughters were inevitably left to shift for themselves" (11), a situation that represents Mrs. Morland's exhaustion and neglect as caused, paradoxically, by her very fruitfulness as a mother.

The ideal of a genre or gender role results in its own undoing throughout *Northanger*. Towards the end of the novel, when General Tilney banishes Catherine, the narrator, self-consciously acting as the story's "contriver," metaleptically substitutes one Gothic trope—the orphan in the wilderness—for another, the heroine returning home triumphant, contrasting Catherine's "hack post-chaise" with the ideal heroine's "several phaetons, and three waiting-maids in a travelling chaise and four" (194). Though for those who project their own teleology of discipline onto the heroine, it may appear that Catherine's humiliation is the last "lesson" she must learn in her ascension to her proper class status, to the less pedagogically-minded reader,

the novel pulls off a slight-of-hand in which the narrator denies her heroine's expected victorious moment only to deliver it a few pages later, just outside the frame of the novel, where the hetero-narrative reader must ironically project it. If the ending seems contrived, and the device of "the most young charming man in the world" suddenly agreeing to marry Eleanor smacks of a *deus ex machina*, we should remember it is a Mr. King, "the master of ceremonies" and thus a pointed surrogate for the sovereign narrator, who introduces Catherine to Tilney in the first place. As the narrator quips, "something must happen to throw a hero in her way," and Catherine requires a matchmaker's intervention to get the hetero-plot started since her feminine charms will not suffice. Moreover, the narrator teases readers that the author could be culpable of a "wild imagination" since Tilney's affection "originated in nothing better than… a persuasion of [Catherine's] partiality for him" (204), juxtaposing the rose-colored commonplaces of romance novels with the cool-headed rationality that governs common life, and possibly hinting that Catherine is Tilney's "beard." Austen confesses that what may seem "wild" to overwrought novelistic discourse is mundane, prosaic, everyday life. The marriage plot in the novel thus acts, for some readers, both as a cover-story for its gay subtext as well as a shibboleth for the violence of the hetero-normative patriarchy.

VII. All Who Loved Either

Whereas Tilney may be otherwise indifferent to Catherine's sexual charms, Catherine herself seems to reserve her truest admiration for the quiet authority of Eleanor, who, upon inviting Catherine to the abbey, begins to replace Isabella Thorpe in Catherine's affections. Castle notes sororal relationships are often exemplary in Austen's universe, above that of lovers, at least that of the male-female variety; in this regard, "the most intense part of [Catherine's] joy

seems to derive from the fact "that in marrying Henry "she also becomes 'sister' to his sister Eleanor, whose subtle approbation she has sought—and glowingly received—throughout the novel" (128). Isabella was supposed to become Catherine's sister-in-law through Isabella's engagement to Catherine's brother, James; later, Isabella is supposed to become Eleanor's sister-in-law through Isabella's engagement with Frederick Tilney. Isabella is presented as the bad potential sister, in some degree for chasing after men to the neglect of her sisterly relations, as well as for repeatedly breaking her promises. Against this background, at one point Eleanor uses doublespeak, saying, "Such a sister-in-law I should delight in," to telegraph to Henry that she desires Catherine for a sister-in-law, though Catherine assumes she is referring to Isabella, who Catherine at this point still highly esteems (172). In this way, the whole arrangement of Catherine and Tilney's romance is orchestrated obliquely, as individual desires are vectored through the nexus of other social forces, by a self-conscious author pulling the strings—and heartstrings—of her characters, just as the characters' seeming autonomy is produced in the interstitial winks and nudges they give in the face of dutifully fulfilling both their social and novelistic roles.

Margaret Sullivan, for example, convincingly emphasizes the lesbian potential of Catherine's trembling and hesitant opening of the "box" or "cavity" in her bedroom. The descriptions of this climactic scene suggestively displace an unwritten erotic encounter with Eleanor, as their "intimacy increases" (45-49). In pointed contrast, Tilney remarks of the furnishings of the same room:

> How fearfully will you examine the furniture of your apartment! —And what will you discern? —Not tables, toilettes, wardrobes, or drawers, but on one side perhaps the

> remains of a broken lute, and on the other a ponderous chest which no efforts can open, and over the fire-place the portrait of some handsome warrior, whose features will so incomprehensibly strike you, that you will not be able to withdraw your eyes from it. (131)

Tilney virtually ignores any boxes, drawers, or other curious cabinetry and only remarks of the "ponderous" chest that it cannot be opened, implying perhaps that he *would* not take the lid off that particular receptacle; instead, his gaze is queerly, even narcissistically consumed by the image of his warrior-ancestor over the symbolically-charged fireplace. Tilney and Catherine's tellingly different objects of erotic fixation in this bedroom scene forecast discomfiture with the hetero-narrative's progress.

If General Tilney roughly kicks Catherine out of his house, Henry more suavely threatens her by the sinister innuendo that she could "not cope" with him and that he would "leave" Catherine "far behind." Henry delights in his enthusiasm for Gothic novels, which comes at the expense of his regard for both Catherine and Eleanor. After Eleanor relates how Henry left her in the lurch to go read *Udolpho*, Henry crows about his own superior learning. Whereas Henry earlier forced an extravagantly extended analogy between dancing and matrimony, here he seems to give a veiled warning of his own fickleness. Boorishly oblivious to his sister's comfort, he "broke his promise" and "ran away" with something that was "particularly her own." In employing the discourse of a rakish villain abducting his mistress from a legitimate suitor, it is uncertain how much Henry is fully aware of his own sadistic irony in using that incident to establish evidence of himself in Catherine's good opinion (that is, as a potential mate, not as a voracious reader), or whether the irony is authorial, mocking both an enthusiasm for Gothic

novels and the excessive desires they can arouse, while Henry's "pride" remains quite genuine. Is Henry facetiously impersonating a Byronic hero or has he become an authentic "female impersonator" from reading so many novels? Either way, Henry becomes a queer self-parodic figure that does not seem ideally suited to Catherine. Moreover, unlike Catherine, Henry's self-absorbed attitudes never seem to achieve a moment of recognition, the self-mortification that would signal his change from a polished yet policing show-off. He never accounts for his own broken promises and narcissistic behavior.

Northanger Abbey, though, is itself a type of account book. Concerned as it is with social contracts—meeting one's engagements, being engaging, and making marital engagements, it seeks to account for its own generic promises, as well. The text lives up to the multiple expectations fostered over the course of its narrative; it can be—and often has been—interpreted as a Gothic novel, a realist novel, a romance, and a parody by various readers and critics. Any of these accounts of the story by itself, however, fails to pay adequate dividends. Instead, the text displaces and transposes each of these genres with and onto each other, simultaneously fulfilling each set of conventions while subverting them. The novel performs the code of laws it writes even as it mocks it, opening up a space of playful courtship between reader and narrator, engaging its different readers by playing off the discourses it appropriates. Similarly, the novel holds out a hetero-normative narrative that ends in happy marriages for its straight or sentimental readers at the same time that it holds that narrative back, questioning the terms of heterosexual relations and contracts for its queer readership. Thus, despite the nature of almost all academic criticism to pit one reading against another so as to claim the text for a certain outlook or history, *Northanger Abbey* decidedly obeys the logic of "both/and": the pattern of its self-parody, emphasizing a difference from its own generic identity, can only be seen when the many

conventional configurations it self-consciously raises are all recognized as co-existing and, hence, superimposed, just as overlapping a sentimental rose-colored lens and an analytic cold blue lens might produce a markedly lavender picture of the world, which is different from either.

In conclusion, the strategy of self-parody used in the *Northanger Abbey* imitates the hetero-plot of Gothics such as Radcliffe's, self-consciously "performing" the conventions with a critical or ironic difference. Austen seems to simultaneously fulfill and mock her reader's foregone conclusion of the novel's conventional marriage ending when she states:

> The anxiety, which in this state of their attachment must be the portion of Henry and Catherine, and of all who loved either, as to its final event, can hardly be extended, I fear, to the bosom of my readers, who will see in the tell-tale compression of the pages before them, that we are hastening together to perfect felicity. (209-210)

Although we are given the marriage we expected all along, in this last flourish forestalling closure, the novel obeys pre-encoded conventions while authorizing subtle deviations from them. What seems like closure is also the deflection of any closure. Robin Grove comments that Austen's ending forestalls a moment, "admiring its own contrivance, hold[ing] itself mockingly up to the light" (182). There is recognition of alternatives that free the discourse from the normative or naturalized constraints; as Grove says, "one of the disconcertingly open effects of Austen's ending is to bring into sight… other feasible conclusions to the tale" (184). After all, some readers may recognize the queerness of the two characters, which makes their union in storybook "perfect felicity" unlikely, though our perfect felicity with the narrator's subtext may be another matter. The passage points out the very real circumstances of the book itself as a

material object, which tells a tale independent of the text written on it. The narrator subtly asks us to question who the "all who loved either," might be, whether implied readers (over-) identifying with the characters or, perhaps, homoerotic love interests such as Eleanor. Much like *Northanger Abbey*'s self-parody of Gothic novels, which often acts to both inscribe and quixotically send up novelistic conventions, the novel also sends up prescriptive gender roles at the same time it ostensibly fulfills them, insisting on having it both ways.

Chapter Two

Pastoral, Pastiche, and the Neoclassical Impasse

Pastoral is a mode that conventionally ennobles a simple, though meritorious, hero. The shepherd guiding his flock is parallel to the structure of the sovereign of an aristocratic court. Whereas the plots of Gothic novels often feature orphans who rise to a privileged status, pastoral poems elevate the rural laborer into a fictive space of idyllic verdure that is the counterpart of cultured idleness. While the machinery of Gothic novels posits a historically unspecific "dark ages" through which it comments on transformations in the contemporaneous domestic and public spheres, many pastorals create an imaginary "golden age" that sets the stage for an allegorical critique or celebration of a more topical political scene. William Empson remarks that "the most vivid expression in plot of the sentiment that combines heroic and pastoral is the theme of the prince brought up in secret by the peasant," a theme that he notes is "ripe for satire" since "really heroic love is superior to social convention; it may be pastoral enough to produce bawdy farce" (196-197). Empson here goes so far as to identify the types of the Gothic orphan and the pastoral swain as expressions of the same underlying motive, the idealization of the low romantic hero. This ambivalence between the gullible peasant and gallant prince—when one is revealed as or stands-in for the other—can produce mock-pastoral bawdy, as Empson notes, because the hero's supposed sincerity of sentiment can resemble *both* simple-minded naïveté and too-knowing posturing from a more sophisticated and ironic reader's viewpoint. In the contexts of debates about the propriety of pastoral that spanned the entire eighteenth century from William Walsh's *Essay on Pastoral Poetry* in 1687 to Wordsworth's famous preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798, Pope's response in *Guardian, No. 40*, and Gay's *The Shepherd's Week* are

particularly instructive examples of the potential slippage between bucolic idealization and idyllic burlesque. Burlesque, in fact, shares a structural similarity to pastoral in that burlesque treats low subject matter in an elevated manner,[3] often as much in order to parody the hackneyed conventions of high literary efforts as to celebrate the cruder or more commonplace pleasures, much like pastoral elevates gentle rustics into genteel aristocrats.

Moreover, pastoral is always threatening to lapse into bathos since the poetic decorum of the genre must evade the gritty reality of the barnyard and countryside. The figure of the noble shepherd can quickly look suspiciously like either a courtly rake dressed up in country rags or a ribald bumpkin puffed-up as a corn king. The author of a pastoral runs the dual risk of either imputing too much cumbersome learning to his country swains or making himself seem as dull and credulous as the characters he depicts. The pastoral mode has always had to find a precarious balance between its seeming simplicity and its knowing artifice, its civilized tone and its hayseed subject. Perhaps for this reason, pastoral inherently has the potential to become self-parody, intentionally so or not, as many of Wordsworth's minor poems too readily demonstrate. The tonal divide between pastoral and mock-pastoral is thin, indeed, and may depend as much on readerly expectations and contextual assumptions as it does on writerly obedience to rules or comprehensive critical interpretation.

[3] The effect of travesty and burlesque depend on the comic energy produced by the marriage of the dignified with the ridiculous. Nevertheless, burlesque is often contrasted to travesty in so far as while burlesque treats a low matter in a high style, travesty takes a high subject and debases it. Scarron's travesty of Virgil and Pope's "The Rape of the Lock" may be thought of as paradigmatic cases: the ostensible subject of the former is the already lofty cultural material of *The Aeneid*, which the author's treatment degrades through archaic, familiar, and petty language (Hall, 120). Pope's burlesque "The Rape of the Lock," by contrast, takes the trivial content of a domestic squabble and elevates it with all the machinations of epic discourse. Maintaining such a distinction requires enforcing a dichotomy between form and content as well as presuming a stable background of values in a given culture that differentiates high and low; it may also be predicated on privileging one level of referential engagement over another—Pope *and* Scarron both directly allude to classical works, on the one hand, and glance at contemporaneous sociopolitical situations, on the other. In fact, the upshot of mock epic and related works oftentimes is to problematize if not ultimately break down the dichotomies between form and content, high and low, or allusion and reference. Thus, while I may sometimes employ such terms, their import is not meant to be freighted with the host of assumptions that these loaded terms traditionally convey in literary studies.

Crabbe's "The Village" similarly continues the neoclassical tradition of pastoral while challenging it, laying bare the tensions that the genre underwent as it transformed during the early Romantic era to imitate classical models less and reflect rural realities more. Crabbe looks back toward a system of patronage and aristocratic privilege as well as ahead to an emerging epoch when the common man—and even lower-class workers that were traditionally appropriate only to comedy—could be celebrated as tragic exemplars of a shared humanity. The radical transvaluation that takes place in pastoral during the course of the eighteenth century resulted, in large part, from a widespread structural development in the literary marketplace as it opened up to new audiences, thereby allowing a readership that could sympathize with and respond to those exploited by nascent industrialization. Whereas during the Renaissance and into the late seventeenth century the readership for pastoral was primarily if not exclusively a coterie of aristocratic males and the writers they patronized, the eighteenth century witnessed diverse new readerships that rarely had likeminded views.

In making this claim, I am not merely positing a symptomatic relationship between the vicissitudes of specific literary works and their sociopolitical contexts; rather, I use this historical background to elucidate works through two sources: tracking their reception and reading closely the formal properties that inhere in the texts themselves. Both the inside and outside of these texts, as it were, exhibit divisions among the implied as well as the real audiences that read them, which cause an ambiguous cleavage in the texts themselves. By examining this self-division, eighteenth century pastoral can be understood as a locus of anxieties about nationalism, realism, and, most especially, class. Writers had to negotiate contentions surrounding the pastoral genre that included the competing claims of native versus classical traditions, the degree to which accurate depictions of rural lowlife interfered with the genre's decorum, and the perspectives of

emerging middle- and lower-class readers. Generally, the orientation of seventeenth century pastoral poems—Milton's "Lycidas" or Marvell's "The Garden," for example—look toward classical models and avoid any prolonged representation of the genuine condition of rural laborers; they appeal to a readership of aristocratic gentlemen. Early nineteenth-century poems (Wordsworth's "Michael" or Clare's "The Village Minstrel," for instance) show far less overt allusions to classical prototypes and more sympathetically depict the hardships of the poor. In the cases where class conflicts have been elided in Romantic poems, the poems' insistence on a shared humanity implicitly gives evidence of diversity in the marketplace since the need to stress the shared aspects of one's condition is only required in a literary culture where there are widespread differences of opinion, class, and standing among potential audience members.

Then again, Sukanta Chaudhuri argues that "Lycidas" signals a decline in pastoral by growing increasingly, even overwhelmingly, "allusive and externally oriented" (423) so that "Milton achieves success by narrowing and diverting the possibilities of pastoral… professing minimal adherence to its basic assumptions [wherein]… the poet's personality… outgrow[s] the confines of a pastoral persona" (423-425). Though later Romantic poets might attempt to throw off pastoral baggage through de-emphasizing classical allusion and an inheritance of received forms, ironically Milton foregrounds these very devices to undermine the genre. For that matter, Chaudhuri claims that Marvell already heralds the decline of pastoral because he "vitalize[es] pastoral by the only means remaining to him: working against its grain, exploiting its tensions and paradoxes, replacing its simple finished forms by probing, teasing, open-ended explorations" (431). Though Marvell may speak of *otium*, his real motives are to depict a thoroughly humanized nature that offers a complex symbolic stimulant or mental provocation, says Chaudhuri (441), since Marvel is, in fact, "a late and largely eccentric reworking" of the central

line of Renaissance pastoral (446). Nonetheless, given these complications, one might almost be tempted to define the chronotope of pastoral as relying on a perpetual sense of temporal decay and return, just as the figure of echo itself is a decay of a previous sound that returns with a noticeable difference: pastoral—like parody—provides ground not so much of work as of constant reworking, a poetics whose turns are always also returnings.

In this context, the doubling back has the potential to produce inadvertent distortions and feedback effects. Pope's ironic praise of Philips acts as more than just a ruse to circumvent the censor: it allows him to either echo or reframe his own more youthful viewpoints as put forward in "A Discourse of Pastoral Poetry" as well as to create a bad copy of a so-called hack poet that is simultaneously a delightful original, a technique of "counterfeiting" (as Hugh Kenner deems it) he will subsequently develop in his later, more famous works such as *Peri Bathos* and *The Dunciad*.[4] Pope's anonymous article in *The Guardian* demonstrates a double negotiation of his audiences. He not only dupes those who sympathize with Philips under the mask of false encomium, but he also attempts to reconfigure the values and traditions of pastoral that he himself once asserted. Similarly, Gay's *Shepherd's Week* performs divergent roles for its various readerships. While some viewed the work as Gay's parodic riposte in a continuation of the Pope-Philips quarrel, others read it as a send-up of the pastoral genre more generally or an attempt to move pastoral in a realistic, if bawdy, vein that faithfully represented country matters. The

[4] Less famously, Pope shows a continuing interest in this technique of appropriating seemingly inferior work in order to make entertaining light of it, such as in his *An Essay on Criticism*, lines 265-284, in a passage where he condenses an episode from a "false" tale of *Don Quixote* penned by Don Alonzo Fernandez de Avellanda (Audra and Williams, 270). Pope, by choosing to illustrate an apocryphal episode—but not identifying it as such—delights in the slippage between authentic and counterfeit work, playing fast and loose with his citations of *Quixote* since he elides attributing any author function, part of the issue at stake.

various responses to Gay's pastoral display that the multiplicity of the text enables shifting assessments of its significance, which, in turn, reveal the fault-lines and fractures in the expectations of the changing audience for pastoral. In some ways, Crabbe's "The Village" goes still further, explicitly addressing and contrasting diverse audiences and juxtaposing competing pastoral styles. The self-division in all three texts speaks to the rupture in the audience of pastoral over the course of the eighteenth century and shows how new audiences helped transform the genre.

As Maynard Mack remarks, Tickell's articles in *The Guardian*, which preceded Pope's, communicates:

> (like Addison in his prohibition of mythology, Johnson in his discomfort before *Lycidas*, and the best writers of the century generally in their efforts to redefine the genre)… a sense, however oddly or perversely expressed, that the classical pastoral as a vehicle of serious thought and feeling is dead. (216)

Nonetheless, the very "deadness" of pastoral is what marks Pope's article in *The Guardian* along with Gay's *Shepherd's Week* and Crabbe's "The Village" as self-parodic efforts that both sedulously obey codified rules and yet send those rules up in a way that helps revive the genre.

Instead of attempting to contain the covert parody of the pastoral pose that had resulted in the neoclassical impasse of insipid verse, these writers recognize and exploit the generic instability of pastoral in different ways. Pope exaggerates the low, uncouth ballad tradition of pastoral to contrast it with the classical models that his own youthful attempts resemble. Gay, by contrast, ironically embraces the low and homely road of pastoral even while living up to

classical decorum—in fact, by showing that the notion of decorum in the classics is something of a myth. Crabbe applies a different strategy: he pits his audiences and styles against each other, playing one off the other, in an explicit critique which nevertheless recognizes both the virtues and vices of various types of pastoral. He thereby reveals pastoral's inner contradictions and instability as pastoral's low subjects were increasingly incongruous with the mode's perceived aristocratic pedigree.

Class and Classicism in the Debate over Pastoral: Alexander Pope's *The Guardian, No. 40*

Pope's essay in *The Guardian, No. 40*, in putatively attacking the *Pastorals* of Ambrose Philips, reveals how neoclassical rules for pastoral rely on a sense of class discourse. Whereas Virgilian pastoral refines the peasant's speech to make it acceptable to—and to identify it with—the nobility, Spenserian pastoral appropriates features of rural dialect and does not address as elevated an audience. In the essay, Pope creates an example of a mock pastoral, which, by refusing to artificially refine the language of the peasants it depicts, he deems "true pastoral." He then rejects this more realistic, Spenserian pastoral tradition for the refined discourse of Virgil and his classical heirs. Nonetheless, the irony in Pope's essay is rendered ambiguous by his anonymous author position that ostensibly identifies itself with Tickell, his seeming contradiction of his own earlier statements, his positioning of himself as an outsider, the essay's context in a middle-class periodical, and the evident liveliness of the mock pastoral he creates. Due to these complicating factors, multiple implied reader positions are available in the text, making Pope's essay susceptible to being viewed as a self-parody.

I. Neoclassical Rules and Class Discourse

Early in his article, *The Guardian, No. 40*, Pope establishes the "first Rule of Pastoral, that its Idea should be taken from the Manners of the *Golden Age,* and the moral formed upon the Representation of Innocence; 'tis therefore plain that any Deviations from that Design degrade a Poem from being true Pastoral" (379). He then summarily dismisses most of Theocritus's *Idylls* and all but two of Virgil's *Eclogues* as not comporting to this rule. By showing how the paradigmatic classical examples of pastoral do not fit the "rules" laid forth by the previous critics in *The Guardian* dispute, which he parrots, Pope licenses his own "deviations." If these are indeed the rules of true pastoral, he implies, then, ironically, it is a "degraded" genre—to reject Virgil's poems as pastoral means that while they may fail at being pastoral, they succeed at being better as poems because of it. In fact, Pope declares, Virgil and Theocritus "*never meant them all for Pastorals*," if by pastorals one means verse that accords with this narrow, neoclassical definition (380).

But what, exactly, is Pope's quibble with the so-called rule? One hint is given when he states that "*Virgil* hath been thought guilty of too Courtly a Stile; his Language is perfectly pure, and he often forgets he is among Peasants" (380). The rule that Pope quotes is almost contradictory since the "manners" of the mythical Golden Age, even among its shepherds and cowherds, would be refined and courtly whereas the "moral" of a pastoral would need to be formed on a representation of innocence that is rustic and very nearly naïve. On the one hand, so-called "purity" of language (actually, the class-coded speech of the urbane court) betrays a pastoral's faithful representation of rural innocence. The antiquated or bumptious dialect of some country bumpkin, on the other hand, undermines a pastoral's requirement of genteel manners. When Pope accuses Philips of having "the strictest regard to Propriety," it is an underhanded

way to say that Philips's poems employ rustic, lower-class speech patterns (380): Philips's awkward swains aping genteel manners sound like naïve social climbers. Pope himself, like Virgil, would rather risk sounding too courtly than too country, as if his idealized figures were dressed-down nobles going for an afternoon romp on their manor since the primary audience for pastoral is sophisticated, urbane, and upper-class.

Pope's article for *The Guardian, No. 40,* has been generally viewed as a satiric attack on Ambrose Philip's *Pastorals* and the praise that they garnered from Tickell (and perhaps Addison) to the neglect of Pope's own efforts in this vein. If we understand the incident as the obviously masterful Pope, upset at being overlooked by the critical establishment, dashing off a mocking squib to put a poetaster in his place, we will be tempted to read the tone of the article as vituperative sarcasm, and consider Pope's strategy to prove his own poems' superiority to Philips's poems needful of little more elaborate rhetoric than placing quotations of the two poets side by side. The relative merit (or, dis-merit) of the poems speaks for themselves: in what Hugh Kenner calls "phosphorescent quotation," (3) Philips's poems could become a parody of themselves by simply being quoted in a new context. In such a context, Pope's ire—and irony—is thus directed at anyone still foolish enough to attempt denying that his pastorals are triumphant.

Even in this reading, however, Pope's citation of Philips's poems creates an agonistic call-and-response between two bards that, although positioning Philips as a necessary foil, imitates pastoral competition itself: that is, Pope's article takes the form of meta-pastoral. Yet, whereas traditional idylls affirm poetic competition as a concomitant of ultimate friendship, Pope's scabrous jibes and opportunistic quotations seem the result of injured vanity. There is some sense that Pope's implicit praise of his own work is heavy-handed and didactic, and that he

regards the performative genre of pastoral too earnestly. Though they are incorrigibly decorous, metrically mellifluous, and classically erudite, it would be difficult for anyone to argue that Pope's youthful pastorals stand up to his own mature work. Their sense seems silted and artificial—they speak with an enervated diction about subjects of mythic fantasy. After all, at the time of writing the article, Pope is still a relative upstart, struggling for recognition and, hence, composing his own promotional material.

II. Critical Impersonation and Pastoral's Double Illusion

Further complicating any reader's understanding of *The Guardian* article is the fact that Pope submitted the work anonymously, impersonating the voice of Tickell (whom he may, at any rate, have mistaken for Addison) and referring to himself in the article in the third person as "that Gentleman" while claiming the previous "Discourses of *Pastorals*" as his own (379). A reader contemporaneous with the dispute, bereft of critical apparatus or insider knowledge, may have reasonably or initially not suspected the work is a parody: after all, to publish in *The Guardian*, Pope had to disguise the article to get it past the very censors whom he attacks. In hindsight, though, the end of Pope's article seems to show his cards to any reader who has not realized the ironic edge throughout by claiming "that according to the Description we have given of this sort of Poetry, they [Pope's own pastorals] are by no means *Pastorals*, but *something Better*" (386). Pope may be deploring the narrow definition of pastoral put forward by Tickell and others, as well as the tendency of many neoclassical critics to look at literary rules and precedents rather than examining the merits of a work in itself.

This concluding remark, however, also points out the underlying problem of the instability of the pastoral genre, which must remain idealized and elevated—quite often by

naturalizing the political order under the guise of celebrating the order of nature—even as it simultaneously must address country matters. In "A Discourse on Pastoral Poetry," Pope admits the evasion inherent to the genre when he states, "We must therefore use some illusion to render a Pastoral delightful; and this consists in exposing the best side only of a shepherd's life, and in concealing its miseries" (5). The work of pastoral, then, is to create the illusion of idleness. But, one could go further than Pope: pastoral's ideological function is to first posit an imaginary moment of innocence, in the historical or mythological past (the golden age or before the fall), in members of the lower classes, and in the country (as both nature and nation). Second, pastoral then appropriates the innocence of this illusory other to identify it with the urbane upper-classes in the political present to create a *double* illusion. However, the doubling of the illusion threatens to betray pastoral at each turn as either too rustic or too much of an aristocratic ruse.

The Guardian, No. 40, actually challenges the possibility of satire, traditionally understood, since traditional satire proceeds to ridicule an object from a set of stable background assumptions that the satirist and reader share. Pope, however, acknowledges that the conventions of pastoral are a moving target—just what counts as a pastoral, what counts as a good pastoral, and if any pastoral is capable of being good per se are all questions that form the basis of the on-going debate. Pope, in fact, knows his readers do not necessarily share his assumptions since he is publishing not only in the same journal but even in the same voice that slighted him. Pope's act of critical ventriloquism appropriates the authority he hopes to discredit, thereby creating ironies and inconsistencies in whatever view could be called his own even as he insinuates there are contradictions in the view he seeks to oppose.

III. Frames of Reference and the Politics of Decorum

The article further destabilizes the multiple frames of reference against which any evaluation of the merits of Pope's poems can be made. In *The Guardian, No. 40,* Pope claims that all but two of Virgil's *Eclogues* "must be rejected" as not conforming to the strict dictates of the genre of "true Pastoral," which must be based upon the "Representation of Innocence" (379). A reader could take this statement sarcastically: if most of Virgil's *Eclogues* do not make the cut, then that only proves the absurdity of the rule being applied since Virgil's poems should be regarded as paradigms of the genre. However, Pope says much the same thing in his far more earnest-sounding "A Discourse on Pastoral Poetry" where he quibbles with Theocritus for including fishermen and reapers in his *Idylls* as well as remarking that Theocritus can be too rustic and immodest for the decorum required of pastoral. Pope then goes on to say that "*Virgil* who copies *Theocritus*, refines upon his original… tho' some of his subjects are not pastoral in themselves, but only seem such" (5). While it is possible Pope changed his mind, these two statements are so similar that it is difficult to understand how the first could be intended ironically if the second is meant in earnest. As is often the case in Pope, the veils of potential irony around several, seemingly inconsistent statements render Pope's "true" authorial position indeterminate. It is even possible for a reader to view Pope's pronouncement of autocratic dicta in *The Guardian* as a self-parody of his own position in "A Discourse."

Pope's statements are further complicated by the fact that he is most likely parroting Rapin's *Dissertatio* and Fontenelle's "Discours," which both try to form neoclassical rules of pastoral based on ancient texts while simultaneously excluding some of those very precedent texts—including certain eclogues of Virgil and idylls of Theocritus—as suitable to the genre they help constitute. It is possible that Pope was once sympathetic to these neoclassical critics, but simply changed his mind and subsequently showed forth the absurdity of their position.

Pope's tone, however, remains ironic and ambivalent enough to make any definitive attribution of his authorial position problematic. Hence, readers would be justified in seeing the anonymous reviewer of *The Guardian, No. 40*, as either parodying the position of Rapin and Fontenelle (as well as the younger version of Pope) or as sincerely asserting a neoclassical aesthetic outlook.

If one understands the article as a parody against neoclassical rules, Pope, using a somewhat etiolated understanding of Virgil as his model, is refining pastoral out of existence. In *The Guardian, No. 40*, he claims:

> Mr. Pope has fallen in to the same Error with *Virgil*. His clowns do not converse in all the Simplicity proper to the Country: His names are borrow'd from *Theocritus* and *Virgil*, which are improper to the Scene of his Pastorals. He introduces *Daphnis*, *Alexis*, and *Thyrsis* on *British* Plains, as *Virgil* had done before on the *Mantuan*; whereas *Philips*. . . hath the strictest Regard for Propriety, makes choice of Names peculiar to the Country , and more agreeable to a Reader of Delicacy; such as *Hobbinol*, *Lobbin*, *Cuddy*, and *Colin Clout.* (380-381)

Pope's criticism of his own poems here is not entirely without merit, though it should be noted that Pope's pastorals also mix in a few English names, alluding to himself as the heir to Spenser: "That flute is mine which Colin's tuneful breath… taught the Groves my Rosalinda's Name" (13). Despite the tongue-in-cheek jab at the somewhat ridiculous names Philips employs (and which Gay will later adopt), Philips has likewise taken his precedent from Spenser and other poets native to Britain. Pope's importation of foreign and ancient gods from a creed outworn *is* incongruous when his pastorals ostensibly praise the English countryside. Pope hints as much

through his pun on clown, which ambiguously signifies peasant, but also rustic, bumpkin, boor, and the Shakespearean stock figure of the clumsy clodhopper. Nonetheless, Pope's so-called "clowns" are the Greco-Roman mythic gods he portrays in faux-rustic garb, underscoring the fact that the shepherds who populate his pastorals are not actual country laborers but thinly-disguised stand-ins for the upper-class.

Furthermore, the ironic appeal to the "delicacy" of the reader points out that Pope expects *his* audience will be gentlemen, aristocrats, and landed gentry who would have little real interest in the uncouth doings of peasants. Pope's own strict "regard for propriety" is, in practice, a regard for property divisions since his technique functions to remove any genuine reference to the English peasantry and replace it with an idealized illusion of mythic splendor. While Philips's poems have propriety in regard to the language of the peasants he represents, Pope recognizes that propriety of language also needs to accord with the actual audience that will receive the text. This places pastoral into a dilemma: either pastoral needs to distort and "prettify" the discourse of peasants so that it will be acceptable to its presumably upper-class audience, or, adversely, the lower-class cant of peasants can be retained in pastoral, though this would make it an indecorous genre for the gentry to read.

In light of this, what is really at stake in the debate over pastoral is neither the felicity of expression nor the substance of the ideas in the poems, neither the form nor the content. Rather, at stake is the underlying political purposes and the necessary background values that pre-structure reception, both of which help constitute the genre. Pope makes it clear that the content is not at issue because he cites examples from each poem in which parallel incidents are treated. By the early eighteenth century, the mode of pastoral had been reduced to a series of poetic set-pieces, études for poets to practice theme-and-variation as they warmed up their chops for their

more epic ambitions. Alternatively, though Pope takes a few digs at Philips's awkward periphrasis and bumpier metrics, this is not the brunt of his irony. Pope says, for example, in praise of his own work, "Our other Pastoral Writer [Pope himself], in expressing the same Thought, deviates into downright poetry" and "The other Modern [again, Pope]… it must be confessed hath a knack for Versifying" (382). Pope allows that the two poets are expressing the "same Thought," which becomes the very basis of his comparison. Yet, Pope openly proclaims that he possesses a greater "knack for Versifying," so that the quality of the poets' versification alone cannot be the covert rub of Pope's sarcasm; Pope's superiority in this matter is stated baldly. Nevertheless, one might read Pope's praise of himself as a backhanded compliment since a "knack" for mere versification implies something perhaps dainty or underhanded—a contrivance, trick, artifice, or deceit (OED). Pope possibly hints that his own elegant numbers can be ideologically numbing, as if well-wrought verse might cover up some rotten truth. Then again, "knack" also connotes a lower-class type of work, cobbling together some knick-knack; it turns the gentlemanly pursuit of poetry into the tinkering of a mere country-bred versifier. Oddly, then, Pope's praise for himself in this instance can be read as an ironic criticism; nonetheless, the matter at the center of the debate is neither formal finesse nor the given subject matter that Pope and Philips are both dealing with.

IV. Country Matters: Spenserian and Virgilian Traditions

More to the point, Pope claims that his own "downright" poetry (though, admittedly, unlike the later *Dunciad*, it is not a poetry that gets very dirty) results from a deviation. Again, he implies that the rules of pastoral have become so rigid or recondite that the only means to make actual poetry is to subtly break them. Pope deliberately projects himself as the rebel and the

"other" throughout his commentary: though it reflects the fact that Philips has commanded attention during previous critical engagements, it also creates an ironic underdog position for Pope to occupy in arguing for his own work. For example, though Pope seems to attack Philips's ignorance of the classics, he points out his own lack of a university education (due to his Catholicism). Though he identifies with the values of the nobility, he quickly disclaims having an aristocratic status himself. He depicts the author of the piece as an autodidact and outsider. Pope's strategy is to implicate Philips's pastorals as too redolent of the speech and lifestyle of commoners and peasants, and thus as too "other" for consumption by his intended audience. But, interestingly, Pope does not wholly identify his own pastorals with the gentry, either. Pope's emphasis on "deviation" and "error" acts to make his own work seem subversive, despite his Tory sympathies. One could offer the riposte that Pope, instead of "deviating into downright poetry" in his pastorals, becomes entrenched in send-ups of stale poeticisms, as his imitations of Virgilian eclogues become "echo-logues" that also lapse into unintentional self-parody. Pope's argument equivocally identifies Philips's low diction with (literally) outlandish dialect, playing on his readers' nascent xenophobia.

That Pope has his sights on a more fundamental issue than asserting his mastery over the poetaster Philips becomes apparent in the latter part of *The Guardian, No. 40,* when Philips drops out of the argument completely. Pope instead concentrates his attack on Spenser himself, Philips's most canonical literary model, as if Pope is staging a clash between Spenser and Virgil about the nature of pastoral. Pope writes that "I should think it proper for the several Writers of Pastoral, to confine themselves to their several *Countries*. *Spencer* [sic] seems to have been of this Opinion: for he hath laid the Scene of one of his Pastorals in *Wales*" (384). Pope casts aspersions on Spenser's archaisms and use of dialect not because his language is inappropriate to

the country figures he represents but because it violates the decorum that seeks to gloss over regional differences for the sake of creating a unified land and language, with England and a "standard" English at its center, which can transform pastoral into an apology for empire. Pope seeks out parallels with Rome, as his own *Pastorals*' employment of Greco-Roman mythic names and topoi make clear despite being discordantly situated on native English soil. Pope makes a pointed dig, for example, at Philips's "elegant dialect," by which he means an uncouth, lower-class country twang that is better kept in its proper sphere.

Pope invokes not Virgil, but Spenser in his defense by stating that Spenser located his pastorals in Wales, thereby keeping the gruff language of such rednecks elsewhere, where it belongs—in a zone that is both a different country and "Part of our Island" (ibid). The "properly" poetic language for Pope, even of pastorals in which the characters are overtly rustics, is to be occupied by the King's English of urbane, aristocratic Londoners, co-opting Virgil *and* Spenser as totems exemplifying nationalist empire-building. The language of the country is to be represented not with rural dialects but with the official speech of the aristocratic classes, who represent the country, that is, England.

V. Mock Pastoral as "Real" Pastoral

Pope's final flourish in *The Guardian* essay is his invention of a hackneyed Somersetshire balladeer that functions as a *reductio ad absurdum* of Philips's crude "Spenserian" pastoral. Pope's parody focuses on petty jealousies of peasant squabbles involving gingerbread in a patently overwrought phonetic transcription. The outlandish faux-West Country dialect of the balladeer contrasts with Pope's own elegant, high-minded literary fabrications in simple, yet refined (and somewhat Latinate) English. The literary values that mark Pope's product as better

than the balladeer's—and, by association, Philips's—are concomitant with aristocratic political values, by which Pope tacitly appeals to his genteel audience. His readers are thus privileged to laugh at the clumsy West Country bumpkins and their inconsequential squabbles of low-life.

This imitation of a poetaster is likely to be one of Pope's first experiments with a mock form. Ironically, just as Pope claims in "A Discourse on Pastoral," that "*Virgil* who copies *Theocritus*, refines upon the original," Pope's own copies of Philips result" in a more engaging work as Pope intentionally employs bathos for its comic effect. The imitation of "bad" poetry can result in a "good" parody. There is a liveliness and delight in the language of the mock pastoral that Pope's earnest pastorals do not display. Nonetheless, Pope wants to distance himself from the mock ballad, opposing his own poetic practice as wholly different in kind from the critical rage for ballads and rustic pastoral. The mock pastoral of Pope's parody is "real" pastoral, though, in the sense that it refuses to create the structure of the double illusion which pastoral in the classical-aristocratic tradition makes. The language is neither elevated above the class of characters it depicts nor does it identify its low characters with the nobility. Though "realistic" in this sense, a comic or mocking incongruity results because the assumed classical-aristocratic audience of pastoral expects the pastoral poet to artificially refine the rustics' language upward whereas, in this case, Pope, if anything, exaggerates the level of language downward below even genuine West Country natives.

A basic problem resides in Pope's inheritance of a residual seventeenth-century context of poets and their patrons, in which pastoral's primary audience was the gentry, and the framework of his present debate, which takes place in a middle-class periodical. If classical-aristocratic pastoral elevates and ennobles its rustic characters, then a parallel can be made with the middle-class periodical itself since it attempts to elevate and ennoble its audience, offering

them access to a more refined world of taste. However, to expose the illusions of pastoral may also threaten to expose the periodical's function of refinement as similarly illusory. At any rate, the differences between Pope's presumed aristocratic audience for pastoral and the actual middle-class readers of *The Guardian* may have the effect of putting Pope's mock pastoral ballad excerpts on uncertain footing: the actual, periodical-reading audience may be more sympathetic toward genuinely rustic rather than falsely genteel representations of peasants.

Pope finishes his essay by proclaiming, "according to the Description we have given of this sort of Poetry [of Virgil, Moschus, Bion and Pope], they are by no means Pastorals, but *something Better*" (386). If true pastoral is the genre that Philips, Spenser, and the fictional Somersetshire balladeer engage in, then Pope would rather take the high road and write pseudo-pastoral with the ancients, even those who tend to be regarded as second-rate. Part of Pope's rejection of Spenserian pastoral, then, stems from his insistence on addressing the gentry in their own level of discourse. This indicates not only a snobbery on Pope's part, but a more fundamental problematic in the genre of pastoral itself that is colored by its political subtext. By seeming to disown the pastoral genre, Pope acknowledges a fissure in the values and assumptions that he can expect from his audience: as the readership of the middle and lower classes was expanding, the assumptions that defined the genre of pastoral were also changing.

Overturning Tropes of Pastoral at the Genre's Turning Point: Gay's *The Shepherd's Week*

The Shepherd's Week partakes of several traditions of pastoral and is situated at the historical turning-point between seventeenth-century aristocratic pastoral with an elevated decorum and later Romantic pastoral that celebrates abject humanity in a more commonplace

language. While some have interpreted the work as a mock pastoral that takes Pope's side in the Pope-Philips quarrel (satirizing Spenserian pastoralists), others have viewed it as a realist work that delights in its low materials and subject matter. Both of these interpretations, however, depend on a certain construction of the class identity of the text's implied reader. In fact, Gay's poem has multiple implied readers and subverts all reader positions: it creates an impossibly heterotopic space using a language that cannot be spoken. The radical ambiguity of the text, then, challenges its readers' assumptions and ascriptions of meaning. Yet, the work itself helps enact a shift in the social context that frames pastoral and, in doing so, allows for the emergence of Romantic poets to usurp pastoral tropes for new purposes.

I. Interpretive Traditions and the Turning Point of Pastoral

By several accounts, John Gay's 1714 poetic sequence *The Shepherd's Week* arose from instigation by Pope (Johnson, 180). Pope himself proclaims that Gay took up this work to defend Pope's position in his current critical dispute with Ambrose Philips about pastoral (Spacks, 30). Thus, one consistent reading of Gay's text over time has viewed it primarily as an extended satire of Philips, employing a zany, exacerbated "rustic" style, similar to Pope's own efforts on a smaller scale in *The Guardian*, for the ends of literary parody. Gay, however, is far from being Pope's polemical attack dog in this dispute. His work has been recognized almost from its inception as initiating a new mode of pastoral, an invigorating comedy of low country life infused with deliberate archaisms and footnoted with mock-academic cant, the merits of which stood on grounds quite outside the Pope-Philips quarrel.

No less an authority than Samuel Johnson writes that whereas the initial impetus as designed by Pope may have been to "copy nature with minuteness, [so that] rural life must be

exhibited such as grossness and ignorance have made it," the resulting product by Gay "had the effect of reality and truth," which "became conspicuous, even when the intention was to show them groveling and degraded" (180). Hence, Johnson declares, "These Pastorals became popular, and were read with delight, as just representations of rural manners and occupations, by those who had no interest in the rivalry of poets, nor knowledge of the critical dispute" (180). The reception of the work has thus traditionally divided between those who situate Gay's pastorals in light of on-going neoclassical quibbles and those who, either unaware of these debates or choosing to highlight other features of the text, see *The Shepherd's Week* as depicting an exuberant "reality" that refuses to gloss over the more uncouth nature of country living.[5]

In terms of the latter reading, *The Shepherd's Week* could stand as the forerunner of the Romantic revival of pastoral rather than as simply the last gasp of the genre in a mocking vein during a short-lived dispute. While Gay's pastorals do not possess the theological natural-supernaturalism shared by many Romantics, his pastorals do help inaugurate a shift toward more genuinely rural concerns and themes rather than idealizing shepherds as stand-ins for aristocrats. Gay's pastorals—even if they were intended in the vein of parody—are perhaps the first to successfully marry low country matters with high poetic precedent in the way adopted by the later Romantic movement. Wordsworth's famous figures of a leech-gatherer and wandering beggars, for example, are not too far removed from Gay's saucy country wenches, fiddling drunkards, and superstitious bumpkins. Given the accuracy with which these low figures were represented, much of the debate, even of Wordsworth during the end of the Eighteenth century, centered on the propriety of representing such figures as anything other than comic, or even as

[5] As Judith Haber notes, other eighteenth-century critics agree with Johnson's assessment of Gay's "realism," including Thomas Purney in 1717 and Robert Shiels in 1753. Similarly, Oliver Goldsmith says that "Gay has hit the true spirit of pastoral poetry. In fact he more resembles Theocritus than any other English pastoral writer whatsoever" (159). Goldsmith's statement can be regarded as an assessment of Gay's realism if we grant that Goldsmith regards Theocritus as preeminently "realistic," at least within the conventions of the genre (159).

beneath the dignity of literature altogether. Whereas Gay seems a "realist" of the quotidian despite possibly setting out to employ a mock form, contemporaneous critics often objected that Wordsworth's early work, despite its intention to be realistically quotidian, ended up coming across as a bathetic mockery.

In large part, as with any texts, differing interpretations depend on the values readers bring with them; but pastoral specifically troubles such valuations because it negotiates such challenges to hierarchical modes of thought as a high poetic form about low stock personages, an idealized golden age blended with the dirty country-doings of the present, as well as homegrown, foreign, and classical precedents that underwrite the authority of the genre. Although Pope's mocking use of uneducated accents and Gay's deliberately rustic or archaic diction appear tongue-in-cheek to some readers in their immediate context in the eighteenth century, the employment of provincial dialects and local manners of speech by Robert Burns and John Clare in their pastorals not too many decades later proves that such techniques are not inherently parodic. The reception of *The Shepherd's Week* evidences the shift in audience assumptions—abetted by increasing numbers of middle- and lower-class readers—that the depiction of rural manners and dialects did not necessarily degrade or indicate the satiric intent of a work; such assumptions later become more normative with the appreciation of such authors as Burns, Clare, and Wordsworth.

In fact, the attitude of pastoral writers was quickly changing over the course of the eighteenth century. To compare Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village* with Pope's *Windsor Forest*, for example, we notice that Goldsmith can lament "Kingdoms by thee [luxury], to sickly greatness grown, / Boast of a florid vigour not their own" (13). The very abundance of the natural landscape is imagined as "florid" and "sickly," which parallels the material abundance of

aristocratic wealth. Goldsmith puns on the meanings of "florid," which signifies abounding with flowers and wrought with fine phrases or ostentatious manners (OED). The oxymorons of "sickly greatness" and "florid vigor" underscore the decadence of the nobility, whose seeming largesse only leads to moral decay. What Goldsmith is critiquing is the enclosure movement wherein common land was usurped by gentry and nobles. Goldsmith asks "where shall poverty reside," and answers:

> If to some common's fenceless limits strayed
> He drives his flock to pick the scanty blade,
> Those fenceless fields the sons of wealth divide,
> And even the bare-worn commons is denied (10).

As the upper classes increasingly enclose the common lands for their private use, the commons is more depleted ("scanty blade," "bare-worn") or off-limits because fenced-in. Goldsmith equates this usurpation of common goods by the aristocracy with the colonizing impulse, as "Proud swells the tide with loads of freighted ore" yet "This wealth is but a name / That leaves our useful products still the same" (9). Just as the upper-classes exploit resources of their colonies abroad, they likewise filch common lands at home. Class conflict seems inherent, and the destitute state of the land itself proclaims the oppressed fate of the lower classes living on it.

Pope, by contrast, mythologizes the bucolic seat of monarchy in *Windsor Forest*. "Peace and plenty" brought about by "a Stuart reign" (Queen Anne) results both in "rich industry" and a fecund landscape that tempts "the joyful Reaper's Hand" (66). The park transforms into a happy hunting grounds, a nearly prelapsarian garden, under a ruler's hand that appears far more

benevolent than grim. The peace-treaty of Utrech is both the occasion and the symbol used to celebrate "the World, harmoniously confused, / Where Order in Variety we see,/ And where, tho' all things differ, all agree" (66). The state of harmonious world politics wherein different national interests can all agree is reified into a diverse and thriving ecological tapestry. Class conflict does not seem inherent, and, in fact, the landscape wilts or flourishes depending on the politics of monarchical power rather than being identified with the lower classes inhabiting a rural commons oppressed by the aristocracy. While the political re-appropriation of pastoral by the lower classes would eventually transform the genre in later Romantic works, it is Gay's work that is located at the equivocal turning point. Whether Gay's sketches mock rural life and the tradition of lower-class pastoralists and balladeers or whether they are a realistic and sympathetic portrayal of country scenes is ambivalent: while he may well have intended the former, ironically for literary history, the reception of Gay's pastorals may have helped pave the way for a readership that could appreciate Romanticism, and make writers of refined, aristocratic pastoral such as Pope outmoded.

II. Heterotopic Meanings and Fractured Audiences

Nonetheless, these two interpretations—a Pope-inspired mockery (whether of Ambrose Philips, Richard Blackmore, Thomas D'Urfey, or even as a burlesque of Virgil and Theocritus) and a proto-Romantic "realism" or humanism—both overlook how *The Shepherd's Week* functions as a self-parody, a text aware of its own uncertain status between such varying modes, traditions, and readers. *The Shepherd's Week* utilizes the very negotiation of values that pastoral presupposes to enrich and pluralize its meanings. However, even the most astute of Gay's contemporary critics have sought to either argue one interpretive viewpoint or to try to benignly

reconcile the two interpretive paradigms. Patricia Meyer Spacks, for instance, canvassing the various critical perspectives, concludes:

> These theories are not really incompatible with one another. It is quite probable that Gay began writing his pastoral in the service of the Pope-Philips dispute; that he included with the satire of Philips some digs at that even more vulnerable pastoral poet, D'Urfey; that the satire on Blackmore was incidental; and that, in spite of all these satiric purposes, the poem rests on a firm foundation of clearly perceived and precisely rendered actuality. This explanation is probable not only because each critical theory seems individually convincing, but because Gay in his early poetry wavered so conspicuously among various perspectives, searched several literary traditions, and incorporated as many points of view as he conceivably could… (33)

Spacks perfunctorily resolves all the prominent critical views. While it may well reflect the etiology of Gay's pastoral sequence, this resolution fails to account for its unique comic potential and ability to unsettle its readers. *The Shepherd's Week* depends on shifting perspectives and incommensurable interpretations, which intractably confront the reader with cognitive dissonance if not, in fact, a transvaluation of the mode of pastoral itself; the parody is not only outwardly directed to over-rated poetasters or the high-flown rhetoric of classical decorum, but foregrounds the contradictions endemic to the mode, producing various cruxes that represent the political turmoil and class-conflict facing the early eighteenth century and beyond. No reader of the poem is safe since it celebrates rural labor as much as it laughs at country ways; it takes the point of view of urbane sophisticates as much as it criticizes courtly indolence. The interpretive

traditions are not as easily compatible as Spacks claims because they rely on inherently different subject positions of the reader and incommensurable assumptions about the nature of pastoral.

Indeed, Gay's poem explicitly pits these two reader positions against each other. Dianne Dugaw, taking up Nigel Wood's suggestion that the poem's true "target is the Courteous reader," notes how the Proeme addresses the aristocratic landowner, imploring him to take a walk in his countryside to view his working-class laborers; however, Gay's Proeme "cites a sinister parallel for this country walk: the lines from *Paradise Lost* in which Satan, in the position of the aristocratic gazers, observes the innocent Eve in her rural paradise" (108). The poem thus seduces the aristocratic reader with its promise of a voluptuous prospect while simultaneously critiquing that privileged view by aligning it with Satan; it not only satirizes the naivety of the rustic rubes it depicts but the urbane upper-class audience who imposes on them, whether through exploitative labor or an aestheticizing perspective. Aristocrat readers are invited to look over the passive yet fertile, feminized landscape, but to overlook the allusion's context just as they see the workers in the field yet conveniently ignore the advantage they take of them. Gay's complex allusiveness acts to reconfigure rather than merely figure its subject. The poem's use of intertextual references and echoes of prior tropes in new contexts render them ironic for both the rural personages represented and for the rarified audience they address. Dugaw, following John Hollander, describes this process as "metaleptic" since it relies "on recognized texts, authors, conventions, events, utterances, and so on" to "frequently set up tenor-vehicle dynamics that imply and play on issues of rank and value" (93). That is, Gay's potentially subversive poetics depends not so much on turns as on over-turning—it puts a new spin on tropes already in circulation. The double capacity of Gay's metaleptic language can make the text simultaneously operate both with and against the outlook of a given audience.

The contradictory, two-fold valence of *The Shepherd's Week* should not be viewed as causing it to address only a fictive audience, however, but as undermining the actual reader positions available in the social context in which the poem circulated. Such a contradiction is productive in that it may goad actual readers to reevaluate their assumptions and thereby help to shift the nexus of values by which the text itself can be judged. Judith Haber comments that Gay's pastoral begins with an allusion to Virgil's farewell to pastoral at the beginning of the *Aeneid*, which Spenser later echoes in the *Faerie Queene*, thereby signaling "a pastoral poem is a contradiction in terms" since the birth of the sophisticated poet marks the death of the naïve shepherd (156-157). She states that Gay is thus engaged in a work that:

> seems aimed neither at contemporary rustic 'realism' nor at neo-classical artifice, but at the gap between the two—at, in other words, the juncture of the literary and the real, the sophisticated and the naïve, the high and the low, the present and the past upon which most pastoral poetry depends… so that the primary effect of most of Gay's allusions is not to create connections but to sever them. (155-157)

Gay emphasizes the incongruity of different pastoral conventions—and the conventions upon which pastoral is based; his allusions are nearly always ironic, subverting the classical source text from which they are drawn. Yet, the seeming impossibility of pastoral becomes in Gay's hands a vivifying principle—not the end of pastoral, as Haber claims, but its perpetual upending. If one of pastoral's most fundamental tropes is the double echo—such as Meliboeus responding to Tityrus while Virgil simultaneously responds to Theocritus—then *The Shepherd's Week* shows why such a "farewell" to pastoral is exactly the starting point any pastoral must begin

from. The only recourse one has to turn away from a naïve past is to turn that past on its head: if, as T.S. Eliot famously said, "we know so much more" than our predecessors, they are precisely that which we know. Though Gay's allusions also allow for readerships that are not-so-knowing, readers who can bypass encountering his slippery citational matrix and instead view it as "straight" realistic depiction, his realism nonetheless undermines the conventions that it is sponsored by. The radical juxtapositions within the poem foreground pastoral's generic gaps and contradictions and enable the text to depict a heterotopia, a space of overlapping and aporetic significations. The poem's plural meanings point to fractures not only within the genre of pastoral but also within the social-political sphere more broadly.

III. Dialectical Forms

The subtitles of the individual poems in Gay's sequence hint that each poem utilizes a different popular form, whether squabble or ditty, spell or dirge. The text implicitly contrasts each of these forms with a more elevated form or technique. Gay appropriates low forms in order to transform them into the equivalent of their high poetic or philosophical cousins. For example, Monday's "squabble" is also a dialectic *agon*, a contest of poetic argument much like those between shepherds in Theocritus. Sending up these low forms, however, is also a way of simultaneously pulling down the moldered, decidedly ornamental vaulting that has accumulated on the high, old structures that have outlived their usefulness. Cuddy and Lobbin Clout cobble together and fuddle through praises for their respective mistresses, which, unwittingly for the rustic bards, results in lots of bawdy and clumsy, backhanded compliments. Cloddipole, who they had asked to judge the contest, finally throws up—and washes—his hands by forwardly announcing:

Forbear, contending Louts, give o'er your Strains,
An *Oaken Staff* each merits for his Pains.
But see the Sun-Beams bright to Labor warn,
And gild the Thatch of Goodman *Hodges*' Barn.
Your Herds for want of Water stand adry,
They're weary of your Songs—and so am I. (10)

In a deft pun, the squabble is announced to have been a "strain" on the patience of the animals each would-be poet superintends, the judge of the contest, and, presumably by extension, the readers of the poem, as well. The "pains" taken by the rustic bards are not as numerous as those given to their judge. Such a condemnation of pastoral ineptitude right at the outset of the work evinces a self-awareness, and ironic self-condemnation, that accords with Samuel Johnson's own dismissal of pastoral as an inherently inferior genre: "A Pastoral of a hundred lines may be endured; but who will hear of sheep and goats, and myrtle bowers and purling rivulets, through five acts" (188). Gay indicates in this initial poem that it is, not in spite of, but *because* of the genre's cloying and cheesy, near unreadability that he will attempt to simultaneously traduce and prolong the pastoral tradition, even while cutting back Spenser's whole calendar to a mere week.

Gay certainly enlivens the tradition. Cloddipole's admonishment also acts as a reminder that composing and hearing such pastoral poeticizing, regardless of any poem's merits, depends on a certain amount of leisure, which cannot easily be sustained in actual rural environments. That is, Cloddipole exposes the pastoralist's contradiction: it is only possible to have such an allusive literary culture that plays games with line-breaks outside routines of backbreaking labor

and conditions of wide-spread illiteracy. If the shepherd-poets took "pains" in composing their verse, such intellectual hardship is ironic since, first, they are not intellectuals but feeble-minded rustics, and, second, intellectual pains may be trifling compared to the physical labor to which they supposedly attend. The judge of the contest says, in essence, stop your blithering and get back to work: a judgment not only about these two poets, but perhaps directed at Pope and Philips (or even the entire genre). The contest can only come about by rustics' neglecting their socially disciplined roles as laborers—and Cloddipole insinuates he beats them with the staff to put them back in their "proper" place.

Cloddipole awards both contenders an "oaken staff," even though the original bet specified that Lobbin Clout could win a staff while Cuddy would win a tobacco pouch. Cloddipole's dismissal of the poets indicates that these "staffs" are not just victorious shepherd's crooks, but signs of their crooked laziness, a loss for all involved. Instead of analogizing a shepherd's traditional implement with a kingly scepter, these staffs are more akin to a Dionysian thyrsus with its fertile associations. Given that the bards are trading subtextual barbs full of insouciant scurrilities, the staff has obvious phallic connotations, just as the tobacco pouch is a vaginal (or scrotal?) symbol. By awarding both "louts" an oaken staff, Cloddipole is perhaps suggesting that the poetasters have only succeeded in "working" themselves up into a state of unfulfilled arousal; his verdict may also hint of homoerotic overtones—the two poets ostensibly sing the praises of some distant female, but are more interested in grappling with each other, poetically as well as sexually. In this sense, the sheep—much like the possibly phantasmal wenches their desires have cathected upon—stands "adry." Furthermore, if the shepherds trade staffs, it both demonstrates their equivalence and nullifies the results of the contest; the dialectic is not resolved into some higher synthesis, but rather the very issue under debate is shown to be

inconsequential. Wittily recalling the original form of Theocritan pastoral, Gay thus covertly denigrates the feud between Pope and Philips, snubbing not only the squabble within this pastoral, but the very terms of the neoclassical "squabble" about pastoral, as well.

If the first poem in the sequence dismisses the then-current in-fighting about pastoral, the last poem, "Saturday; or, the Flights," plays off the very contradiction intrinsic to the pastoral poetic enterprise. The epic muse is ironically invoked:

> Sublimer Strains, O rustic Muse, prepare;
> Forget a-while the Barn and Dairy's Care;
> Thy homely Voice to loftier Numbers raise,
> The Drunkard's Flights require more sonorous Lays. (53)

The contradiction between the orotund, Miltonic rhetoric called for and the "homely" barnyard subject matter is laid bare; only by forgetting the real conditions of rural experience can one presume the fantasies of pastoral. In fact, the "sublime" pastoral poet is likened to a drunken fiddler collapsed in his own swill, who awakens momentarily to screech shopworn ballads (including *Chevy Chase* cheek by jowl with the hundredth psalm) on his cat-gut in an attempt to barter a few busses. Ultimately, the crowd runs away and the "clown," with a face as "ruddy" as the sunset, is lulled back to sleep by the echo of his own "soft, imperfect Strains" (60). The drunkard wants more "sonorous" verse because he feels himself exulted, yet he requires a sonorous lullaby to put him to bed. The lofty "flights" prove not high song, but lowdown flights from reality, and land him in a bathetic stupor that only his own obnoxious intoxication is too dull to recognize as such.

Again, Gay indicates that *The Shepherd's Week* is not merely a polemic mockery of any particular school or poet's attempts at pastoral, least of all an apology for Pope's youthful forays into the genre; it is, instead, a critique of the very premises of pastoral spoken from within the guise of the pastoral conventions themselves. Its interrogation of pastoral premises results in a self-parody that, at once, implodes the problematic genre and makes its continuation possible by foregrounding its troubling nature. Throughout the sequence, Gay is consciously performing a pastiche of all the generic conventions—with explicit references to precedents ancient and modern—so that he can then artfully sabotage the declared afflatus of the poem by framing devices and asides, which point out the text's mere conventionality.

IV. Deceptive Females and Naïve Readers

Though Gay's portrayal of females who deceive their lovers could be viewed as potentially misogynistic, in the context of the poem, these female figures stand for the ironic transactions that can take place between naïve and sophisticated readings of texts. Gay demonstrates that naïve and sophisticated positions are capable of inversion. Gay's authorial position is less like the reeling drunkard who denies his reality, preferring to see the manor rather than manure in his false enthusiasm, and more like Susan, who "feign'd her Coat or Garter was unty'd, / What-e'er she did, she stoop'd adown unseen, / And merry Reapers, what they lift, will ween" (54). Like Susan, Gay's poetry stoops to its low matter, yet in a manner that is feigning and unseen because of its *sprezzatura*. His saucy vivaciousness takes evident delight in what it depicts, and his verse pretends to be looser and less tied up or tidy than it is. His happy readers will thus reap from his poems whatever their fancy can lift from the text, to beautify, believe, or make of what they will. This Susan squeals with delight—unlike the Apocrypha's innocent

Susanna who is blackmailed by lecherous, voyeuristic elders; the youths who hear her echo, however, mistake the sound for dismay at some phallic, serpent-like "Adder" (54). Just as the echo adds a double-voiced inflection that can change the tone of her cry or calling, Gay's readers may add their own import to his poem, interpreting it, variously, as a mocking satire of naïve and lustful country folk, an erudite verse wrought with subtle classical, Biblical, and English literary allusions, or a realistic portrayal of country pastimes. By negotiating these seemingly discordant tones and intentions, Gay critiques pastoral conventions that emphasize any one vein to the exclusion of the others while his own verse continues to add to all of these pastoral traditions, consequently shaping pastoral into something new.

Formally, Gay employs a wide array of techniques to gain critical distance from, even while employing, the conventions of pastoral. Often, since love is the theme of all but the last poem, Gay relies on a bathos that reduces human longing to animality, such as in Tuesday's "Ditty" wherein Marian's lament for a lover who spurned her is juxtaposed to her witnessing at the end of the poem:

> …Goody *Dobbins* br[ing] her Cow to Bull.
> With Apron blue to dry her Tears she sought,
> Then saw the Cow well serv'd, and took a Groat. (18)

Marian realizes that she is stuck in the same rut as Goody's bovine stock. Her supposedly pure and dainty aspirations are grounded in stuff similar to their poor, dirty spunk—and consequently, she eats the cracked, wild oat-seeds that she has so wantonly sown. Nonetheless, as her name suggests, the blue apron may be a cloak resembling the Virgin Mary's blue vestments, a sign that

Marian hopes to continue her virginal pose. Likewise, Sparabella keeps finding convenient excuses not to execute her suicidal love-passion in Wednesday's "Dumps" until "The prudent Maiden deems it now too late, / And 'till to Morrow comes, defers her Fate" (28). Despite her claims to having brittle nerves, she is not naïve enough to end her life over a trifling infatuation for a country tramp. Perhaps her innate good sense gets the better of her frazzled (and disputable) innocence, or perhaps the reader's initial impulse to laugh at Sparabella's outlandish, misplaced passion turns to indicate, near the poem's conclusion, that she is an unreliable narrator who cunningly has tricked the reader into believing her woe was greater than it was. These seemingly naïve maidens are shown to have duped their lovers, and their readers, by a studied performance of womanly frailty. Whether one reputes these female characters' knowingness or not, their extravagant feelings have a mayfly's lifespan, as each settles her affairs before the sun has time to set.

Gay's pastorals consistently engage in ironic allusions, puns, bawdy coupled with epic bravado, oxymorons, and contradictory meanings. The preacher's sermon for the whorish Blouzelinda, for example, in Friday's "Dirge" chastises "That None could tell whose Turn would be the next" (49), a sneaky double entendre that not only pays pious lip-service to the contingency of death, but also suggests that no one knew who her promiscuous lips might be servicing next. Likewise, "He spoke the Hour-glass in her praise---quite out" (ibid) may connote, especially by the pause of the extended dash which causes the reader to look for semantic sense before the end of the line, that he praised her voluptuous figure as well as that his speech was long-winded. The preacher can hypocritically eulogize for an entire hour in her praise since he has received ten shillings in her will. Her erstwhile lovers, though, find themselves shafted with worthless pennies, gewgaws, and love-tokens (48). A similar turn is performed on the familiar

Biblical quote "all flesh is grass," as the whole landscape becomes laden with her lovers' memories of rolls in the hay until—lickety-split—they find a new wench, Susan, "And to the Ale-house forc'd the willing Maid" (50). Both forced and willing, the coquettish yet complicitous wench allows them to change a lost love for a new one and their dirge for a drinking song, as their bullish and bullying natures again happily grab their dilemma by renewed horniness. Perhaps, furthermore, Blouzelinda's care of dairy cows betokens the familiar "horns" of cuckoldry since she and Susan encourage the various wags and country rakes around them to betray each other by cheating with one another's wives and mistresses. Moreover, many characters in Friday's pastoral are already familiar to readers from previous sections, and so there is considerable dramatic irony in their statements, as each character's actions and statements can be cross-referenced with their star-crossed, unfaithful lovers' viewpoints.

In Thursday's "Spell," Hobnelia is perhaps the one genuinely ignorant and naïve lover. Her incantation of various superstitious charms echoes many of the clichés of pastoral from the myth of Narcissus and allegories of the birds and bees to Mayday games, mowers of gardens, and prophetic flower-petals. She is simultaneously guilty of over-reading the signs and premonitions of her lover that she finds strewn throughout nature and under-reading her own explications of them. Her interpretation of these homely prophetic devices inadvertently reveal they forecast a meaning the opposite of what she supposes: the omens she takes to betoken her lover's true passion uncover evidence of his unfaithfulness. She says a lady-bug, for example, "leaves my Hand, see to the *West* he's flown, / To call my lover from the faithless Town" (36). Given her wishful thinking, she interprets the lady-bug's flight to indicate that it will be a messenger that helps bring her lover back to her; at the same time, however, her language betrays her hopes of her lover's fidelity since it is clear that her lover consorts in the "faithless" town.

The roundabout language and repetition in this section highlight the circularity of Hobnelia's logic. Nonetheless, her prophecy that she will fall upon her lover when he returns is all too true: her constant spinning and chanting ends in a dizzy spell so that she faints as soon as her lover finally steps through the doorjamb. Instead of becoming a "fallen woman" the way she hoped, she collapses in a literalized swoon. She succeeded in charming herself, like Narcissus, iterating a prophecy until it becomes self-fulfilling, though her echoing language reveals more twists of meaning that turn back upon her with every repetition. In this way, she may not only represent the naïve reader of Gay's poem, but also those who would view themselves as sophisticated readers. There are always more turns to Gay's language than any reader can account for, making us all naïve to a degree, and few more so than someone who sets himself up as a sophisticate.

V. Critical Apparatus and Class Warfare

If the tone and devices used throughout the poems themselves give evidence for Gay's pillory of pastoral as a mode rather than a parody of any one source, the extensive critical apparatus that surrounds the poems provides additional opportunities for Gay to create ironic distance and commentary about the conventionality of the genre. Gay's use of mock-academic exegesis, multiple and often conflicting framing devices, and other paratextual games is similar to, and historically situated between, the more famous use of such techniques in Swift's *Tale of the Tub* (fifth edition, 1710) and Pope's *The Dunciad Variorum* (1729). In Gay's case, the outlook given by the framing device has decidedly class-based implications since he juxtaposes the rustic figures of the poem proper with the paratextual courtly figures. But, much like his fellow Scriblerians, Gay's use of a critical apparatus makes the text more—not less—ambiguous, especially in terms of the implied reader's class assumptions.

In the prose "Proeme" and the verse "Prologue," Gay does not simply oppose the ironic comedy of the poems with more earnest, authorial statements—if anything, the tone of the introductory matter is more slippery since where we may expect some key to the text, he gives us only more riddling locks. In the Prologue, for example, Gay's authorial persona goes to the court to see the celebrated Doctor Arburthnot, a fellow Scriblerian, where he encounters the ladies of the court, whose fairness, he claims, excels country wenches so much that he decides to give up pastoral. However, when he says "Such Ladies fair wou'd I depaint / In Roundelay or Sonnet quaint," he nonetheless may be insinuating that he will continue to expose folly whether of the barnyard or of fashionable society since he describes the sonnet as "quaint" rather than as sophisticated, and the word "depaint,"meaning depict, could offer a pun indicating he would strip these "painted" ladies of their false pretenses. Their "seemly Show" may be just that, mere artifice or show. He then briefly extols the beauty of the ladies by rustic comparisons to a "Flow'r of May" or "oaten Reeds," which could reflect either on the poet-persona's faux-naïve paucity of language or the ladies' lack of pulchritude. Likewise, while he implicitly praises the treaty of Utrech for bringing peace, he acknowledges that the court has exploited the lower-classes when he writes, "Peace allays the Shepherd's Fear / Of wearing Cap of Granadier." Though this statement may be designed as a political remark to thank Bolingbroke, who was instrumental in the treaty of Utrech, it nevertheless seems redolent of a sense of tacit class-conflict since the wars waged that bring wealth to nobles often bring death to the peasantry.

The speaker pretends to want to trade in the rustic poetic genre of pastoral for the more courtly one of sonnets, but is prevented by meeting St. John—i.e., Lord Bolingbroke, to whom the sequence is dedicated. St. John tells him that he should print his pastorals, adding a preface and notes. There is a possible hint that Gay is playing on a scene of religious revelation since he

adds “All suddenly then Home I sped, / And did ev’n as my Lord had said,” obeying “St. John” as if he were some holy emissary giving him a revelation from heaven. Gay’s persona is thus an intermediary, a country boy lifted up by the grace of a courteous and courtly noble if not outright saint.

Bolingbroke’s suggestion to include a preface and notes provides the framing devices that secure the poems their classical pedigree, assuring anxious, upper class readers of their genteel and learned nature while simultaneously baffling and belittling the earnest scholar. Gay’s persona, however, tells the shepherds and maids to rejoice by working harder since the Queen has eased taxes and encouraged free trade, which will benefit them. He is not directing his poem so much at a rural audience as broadcasting to the court and gentry that the policies of Bolingbroke and Queen Anne will help bring more wealth to the nation. When he claims no “Leasings leud [will] affright the Swain,” he may be saying that agricultural laborers and tenant farmers should no longer fear exorbitant taxes or rack-rents, or that they will no longer be lied to, as leasing also means lying or falsehood (OED). However, he may also hint that such workers have been “fleeced” of their labor, with the wool pulled over their eyes. With similar ambiguity, he may be calling the court’s lies or taxes “lewd,” (bungling, rude, or lascivious) or, alternatively, he may be referring to the taxes and rents on the untaught lower-classes.

The Prologue ends with a tongue-in-cheek declaration of the trifling nature of his own pastorals compared to more weighty affairs of state:

> Let not the Affairs of States and Kings
> Wait, while our *Bowzybeus* sings.
> Rather than Verse of simple Swain

Should stay the Trade of *France* or *Spain*,
Or for the Plaint of Parson's Maid
Yon Emp'ror's Packets be delay'd;
In sooth, I swear by holy *Paul*,
I'd burn Book, Preface, Notes, and all. (n.p.)

There is, nevertheless, a hint earlier in the Prologue that the labor of these simple swains is precisely upon what the British hopes of prospering under free trade depend, as Gay exhorts shepherds, maids, and weavers to ply their crafts "For Trading free shall thrive again." Thus, while Gay's jocular pastorals may be inferior to important political matters, the political stakes of the pastorals are that country matters themselves are not inferior to stately diplomacy since, without the labor of agricultural workers, Britain would have nothing to trade. Rural farmers and ill-bred plowmen form the backbone of Britain's economic empire. In fact, read in this light, Gay is not so much denigrating the significance of his work as rallying domestic workers to be less indolent—as pastoral has traditionally represented them. Gay's invocation of St. Paul at the finale gives an ironic tinge to his seeming Damascene conversion away from the country and to the court. Though Gay protest he would censor himself if his text proved detrimental to the economics of nation-building, paradoxically burning the book would make Gay's own labor another wasted resource.

VI. Built on (Romantic) Ruins

The Proeme, too, has a decidedly ambiguous tone. On the one hand, Samuel Johnson is not the only critic who has agreed with its assertion that "it behoveth a Pastoral to be, as Nature

in the Country affordeth; and the Manners also meetly copied from the rustical Folk therein" (n.p.). The realism of *The Shepherd's Week* replaces "all the fine-finical new-fangled Fooleries of this gay Gothic Garniture, wherewith [modern poets] so nicely bedeck their Court Clowns, or Clown Courtiers" with a "true homebred Tast[e]" (n.p.) redolent of the at-times uncouth Theocritus. It is, nonetheless, a queer realism that is always hyper-aware of its own literariness, for one way that Gay's text and Crabbe can be thought as "realistic" is in how it attempts to reach out to address its real and multiple audiences, at least implicitly recognizing the plurality of the marketplace in which the text as a material object is situated. This division within his audience is explicitly confronted.

Gay is here making light of neoclassical pastoral's habit of posing courtly figures in rustic dress, which often—and unintentionally—makes these courtiers look like clownish bumpkins or bumpkins resemble mock-aristocrats. A similar ambivalence can be detected when Gay takes the opportunity to give backhanded compliments to his English predecessors, Milton and Spenser. Of Spenser, for example, he says that "I have also esteemed him worthy mine Imitation," yet "what liketh me best are his Names," which are generally ludicrous puns, archaisms, and portmanteau on country objects. Gay may be earnest in his appreciation of Spenser's choice of names or he may be pointing out how singularly ridiculous they are; it is difficult to tell, though he may well love them *for* their very ludicrousness. In the same vein, the footnotes consistently parallel indecent incidents within the poem to classical precedents in passages from Virgil and Theocritus. Is Gay thereby modeling his poem on classical standards, and demonstrating to contemporaneous prudes just how bawdy and uncouth the originals were? Or is he cherry-picking recherché examples for the purposes of burlesque? The footnotes seem to perform both functions, mocking academic cant at the same time that they bring Virgil down to

earth, reminding his readers that even the most exemplary pastorals must be composed of earthy stuff. Several footnotes also provide glosses for words, arguing (at times falsely) for a homebred, Anglo-Saxon etymology. Again, some may read this as Gay's nationalism aligning the country with the Country while others hear a good deal of satirical teasing in these elaborate genealogies for homebred diction. For example, Gay glosses "Queint" by noting that it:

> has various Significations in the ancient English Authors, I have used it in this Place in the same Sense as Chaucer hath done in his Miller's Tale. As Clerkes been full subtil and queint, (by which he means Arch or Waggish), and not in that obscene Sense wherein he useth it in the Line immediately following. (8)

Gay not only reminds his readers about bawdy Chaucerian precedent here, but he also alerts us to his own strategy of cloaking scurrilities under a respectable guise, even while seemingly denying that he is up to anything untoward. In other words, Gay's footnotes are a bit arch or waggish (the word *queint*, according to the OED, means cunt or cunning or to quench, and often spelled "quaint"—hence, Gay's earlier mention of "quaint sonnets" in the Prologue, for example, could be read as cunning, elaborate, crafty, cunt, or old-fashioned: the multifarious semantic indeterminacy is part of his poetic design). If it appears obvious now that one word is designed to lead the reader in such deviously forking directions, should we doubt that the work as a whole has a similarly destabilizing, centripetal force that throws off the whole hermeneutical enterprise of trying to pin down singularities of meaning and tone?

The language throughout Gay's pastorals belies its apparent simplicity, revealing a tangled network of meanings playing on archaic and contemporaneous diction, as well as ancient

and modern allusions, which allow Gay to play the rustic while maintaining a giddy sense of sophistication. The levels of discourse also create at least two distinct implied reader positions, divided by class. Gay admits in the Proeme that, no matter how accurate one thinks his portrayal of country life, the language he uses to describe it:

> is neither spoken by the country Maiden nor the courtly Dame; nay, not only such as present Times is not uttered, but was never uttered in Times past; and, if I judge aright, will never be uttered in Times future. It having too much of the Country to be fit for the Court; too much of the Court to be fit for the Country, too much of the Language of old Times to be fit for the Present, too much of the Present to be fit for the Old, and too much of any to be fit for any time to come. Granted also it is, that in this my Language, I seem unto my self, as a *London* Mason, who calculateth his Work for a Term of Years, when he buildeth with old materials upon a Ground-rent that is not his own, which soon turneth to Rubbish and Ruins. For this point, no Reason can I allege, only deep learned Ensamples having led me thereunto. (n.p.)

In writing pastoral, Gay admits, he is building on a faulty foundation, heaping a precarious structure of rubbish upon ruins—the genre, really inexcusable, only seems justified by pedigree and precedent. The high poetic language of the genre has been routinely compromised from its very original by a countervailing impulse to affect a rustic simplicity; the golden age of well-spoken shepherds is a never-never-land and can only be concocted from the vantage of a misplaced nostalgia by urbane sophisticates; in short, the language of pastoral is, and always has been, a cobbled hobbledehoy of high and low, archaic and ultra-modern, such that it can only

exist as a fanciful poetic flight of fiction. The irony is that, despite this acknowledgment, Gay continues to perpetuate the genre, albeit in a more self-conscious register. His insistence on pastoral's "unpasteurized" nature, as it were, allows him to exploit its mixed-up, un-homogenized gallimaufry for the purposes of a satire, which is, at least in part, directed toward his various audiences.

Gay's final touch to *The Shepherd's Week* is to include an outsized index, which lists over a hundred items (such as "acorns," "pease-cod," "true-love knots," and "udder") for the slim volume, mocking the academic pretension that would seek to append hermeneutical disquisitions on these humble *materia poetica*, and thus perhaps calling into question the reader position I have taken herein. Gay's work is not just a savage spoof of the genre since he renovates its stale conventions, building something vital and new from its salvaged parts. He criticizes the genre from within, scrupulously obeying all the rules and canons established by the classics and his contemporaries alike, creating a self-parody of the entire mode that nonetheless demonstrates a considerable sympathy with rural life. Martin Price remarks on the vivacity of Gay's portrayal:

> It is not so much that Gay's bumpkins are convincing rustics as that they are curiously attractive. The affronting details have a movement of their own, and the mock form cuts both ways: if it protects the "pastoral vision" from a misguided literalism, it also convicts the pastoral forms of a high-minded vacuity by offering a world of robust animal energy. (255)

That is, Gay intermingles notes from cheap, broadside ballads with the more decorous canonical tradition, playing one off against another. He shows how Virgilian and neoclassical poetics often ignore the home-truths and animating vitality found in ballads while, at the same time, poking fun at naïve pastoralists and balladeer-hacks' platitudes and crass, homely metaphors. As Adina Forsgren writes, the wit of Gay depended on his assimilation of these two seemingly disparate styles:

> There was some justification for the "modern" comparison of ballads with classical Kinds. Passages in Gay's poems sometimes seem indebted to both. But in each case, they retain their own peculiar quality of gentle and delicate mock-pastoral with charming details, an earthy but agreeable realism, set off for a contrast in particular against melancholy or sublime themes in similar genres. (148)

The Shepherd's Week transforms pastoral by merging genres like the homely ballad, bawdy, and the homily, and even quack advertisements that proliferated in rural settings with the canonical ambitions of official pastoral poetry, mostly composed by those seeking patronage from aristocrats. In doing so, Gay transcends the petty pedantry of the Philips-Pope controversy while helping pave the way for the later sea change in the pastoral genre that flourishes with the Romantic poets.

In contrast to the eighteenth-century representation of "the implausible rearguard and consoling fantasy of the All-Comprehending Gentleman" (Irlam, 19) who could take a disinterested and distant survey of increasingly specialized systems of knowledge, Romantic discourse demonstrates a significant shift, that privileged, instead, those figures who appeared

outside normative, authorized systems of knowledge, such as the marginalized or disjointed worker, beggars, children, and Nature itself. Wordsworth's vague "something" in "Tintern Abbey" that is "far more deeply interfused" and "rolls through all things" offers a remarkably different "picture of the mind." Despite the returning visitant's evident alienation from this once familiar landscape, the unnamed and perhaps unnamable "something"—of spirit, river, or memory—presents another consoling fantasy of synoptic power, unifying across classes, but one curiously divorced from social forms of knowledge. Likewise, Wordsworth rewrites pastoral so that it recalls not a former historical age, but a former *personal* age: the child stands in as the golden epoch of almost unmediated closeness with a primal, natural power, which the adult attempts to revive. Perhaps it is worth noting that this turn from consummate gentleman insider to orphaned child of nature as the paradigmatic figure to represent a fantasy of the "mind" falls on the same axis that Gothic charts between a founding, blue-blooded father and a foundling, blue-collared waif. Gay's *Shepherd's Week*, however, represents an ambivalent pivot away from seventeenth-century alignment of pastoral with aristocratic land-owners and toward those who actually work the land.

Gay and Pope are both responding not only to short-lived literary fashions, but also to wide-spread ideological fictions and social factions. The fact that their work is wrought with so many ambiguities and ironies makes it have differing import to their various readerships. As the audience for pastoral changes over the course of the eighteenth century, pastoral becomes less a covert celebration of the court and more an overt celebration of the "common" man and nature. As Foucault remarks, "An important phenomenon took place around the eighteenth century—it was a new distribution, a new organization of… individualizing power" (783). Writing at this crucial turning point of an episteme, Gay and Pope alike employ techniques of self-parody so

that their work both ostensibly meets conventions, literary as well as social, and deviates from them. In this way, they foreground the contending voices and interests they ventriloquize, critiquing their own subject position through others and others through themselves.

Poor Form: Pastoral and Authority in George Crabbe's *The Village*

George Crabbe's poem *The Village* ironically performs the pastoral tropes that it criticizes as outworn and illusory. In doing so, the poem uses the impoverishment of pastoral discourse to point out the real poverty of the populace in the countryside. Unlike many of Crabbe's critics, foremost among them Raymond Williams, however, I argue that there are diverse ideological viewpoints represented in the poem: *The Village* admonishes corrupt social figures of authority by rupturing the poetic figures of divergent pastoral traditions. The eulogistic second part of the poem, neglected by the emphasis of the satiric first part over the course of the poem's historical reception, demonstrates how the poem exemplifies the multiple purposes of poetry to both reflect truths and create fictions. The poem addresses divergent audiences, yet juxtaposes their class interests in order to show how any viewpoint is inadequate in isolation.

I. The Shortcomings of Crabbe's Critics: William Hazlitt and Raymond Williams

William Hazlitt once issued an unsparing attack on the literary reputation of George Crabbe, an eminence of a slightly older generation by 1821 when Hazlitt's essay was first published, with the opening salvo: "If the most feigning poetry is the truest, Mr. Crabbe is of all poets the least poetical. There are no ornaments, no flights of fancy, no illusions of sentiment, no tinsel of words. His song is one sad reality" (299). The terms of Hazlitt's critique may strike us

as incongruous today when those who value poetry often speak of its ability to depict reality—especially reality's sad or inconvenient aspects—over its ability to prevaricate, feign, or take flight from material conditions; sentimental illusions, ornament, and the tinsel of words are now what we often understand as *least* poetical. In any case, Hazlitt seems to contradict himself later in the same essay when he says that given "the ornament of rhyme that is tacked to" his lines, "many of [Crabbe's] verses read like serious burlesque…. If he is a statistic writer, why set his ill news to harsh and grating verse? " (302). So Hazlitt admits there is ornament after all, but it is somehow of the wrong kind, grating rather than ingratiating, bringing harsh news of facts instead of the hushed noise of fancy.

Nonetheless, Hazlitt's suspicions may be accurate in ways he did not quite intend: in Crabbe's early work *The Village*, the ornamentation of the heroic couplets are a pastiche aimed at savaging (yet also salvaging) the false and feigning elegance of neoclassical pastoral. Crabbe could not ignore the economic conditions around him and their disparate relationship to pastoral representations. As Richard Feingold remarks about pastoral and georgic in the late eighteenth century, "these ancient and honored forms began to fail as expressive opportunities for poets who found it both natural and delightful to employ them" (1). Both the failure and success of the genre of pastoral in the eighteenth century was largely predicated on its obfuscation of the squalid facts of rural life. Conditions among the peasantry due to factors such as the Corn Laws, the enclosure movement, and the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution widened the disjunction between aestheticized Rococo shepherds and actual Regency shop-hands to dramatic proportions. While *The Village* burlesques this disjunction, it also criticizes the lower classes, and even celebrates poetry's power of obfuscation itself. Terence Bareham writes that, "One is never sure whether [the poem] is a political attack on the destruction of a way of life, a

sociological attack on that way of life itself, or a poetic attack upon a superannuated genre, which is the real motive-spring of the poem" (135). This uncertainty is, on the one hand, a mark of the poem's shifting perspectives, which allow it a wider scope of reference. On the other hand, the ways of life among the peasantry, which were far from ideal, along with that way of life's demise, were responsible for making the genre of pastoral seem increasingly superannuated. Furthermore, as I will argue below, the poem's literary and economic attacks are not so different: they stem from an underlying critique of the culture's ideological and material conditions.

If Hazlitt is one of the most important early critics of Crabbe, then Raymond William's 1973 classic *The Country and the City* remains the most definitive modern account of George Crabbe's poem *The Village*. Williams's critical approach, however, is unable to do justice to the poem since his efforts to circumscribe the poem as finally advocating a singular, definitive position come up against the poem's own insistent, entangled ideological multiplicity. Williams claims that Crabbe's poem is "truly a counter-pastoral," (92) which aims to expose "the lies of the pastoral conventions." (94). However, Williams feels that Crabbe ultimately fails to comprehend the systemic factors that have resulted in class stratification, focusing instead on sympathizing with individual cases of distraught laborers from the perspective of "eighteenth-century humanitarianism," (93) and so "it is the care of paupers and not the creation of pauperism, which holds the attention and feeling" (94). Despite Crabbe's attempt to look at the real situation of rural laborers, he nevertheless gravitates into a "rhetorical" position, which is a "pathetic retreat" that Williams finds frankly "depressing" (95). Crabbe, Williams claims, thinks the upper classes should be more charitable to their lower class victims who themselves require more self-respect, though poverty and hardship will nevertheless always be with us as part of the human (and, for Crabbe, Christian) condition.

While Williams marshals an astonishing amount of historical context to support his arguments, his reading of the poem itself can be polemical and lacking in nuance, summarizing large block quotations containing complex ironies into stable ideological viewpoints that he then praises or attacks from his own Marxist perspective. He acknowledges that Crabbe's narrator changes his addressee and that the narrator's own vantage vis-à-vis the various parties he depicts switches over the course of the poem. But Williams still seeks to find indications of Crabbe's "real audience," and understand the "structure of Crabbe's values" (92-3), as if the work could be reduced to a monolithic hierarchy of principles aimed at a single, distinct readership.

Backing away from his claim that Crabbe offers a "counter-pastoral," Williams, in fact, states that the poem "is still a pastoral vision" rendered "bitter and desperate by scenes in which it is continually denied" (93). Indeed, contrary to Williams, it is the shifty ironies and shifting entanglements of using a plurality of viewpoints—as they are triangulated among the changing stances of the narrator, his addressees, and the represented personages—that allows *The Village* to systemically critique the complex problems of a many-faceted culture. The poem self-parodically encompasses both pastoral and counter-pastoral, contrasting such issues as humanitarian charity with scathing analysis of political and economic corruption, so that the "glozing indifference to the [social] reality" that Williams finds in Crabbe (95) results rather from Williams's own indifferent glosses of the poem.

While Hazlitt attacks Crabbe for presenting too much dreary realism, Williams argues that Crabbe is ultimately not realistic enough since *The Village* lapses into proposing sentimental humanitarian solutions for the poor rather than recognizes the systemic economic conditions that oppress them. I argue, instead, that both these views are fundamentally wrong. On the one hand, the emphasis on Crabbe's purported realism, even—and especially—by those who champion

realist modes, has led to the popular and critical neglect of *The Village*'s second part throughout its reception history. By drawing attention to the second part, I hope to demonstrate the value Crabbe placed on the fiction-making (and at times obfuscatory) power of poetry to regulate the emotions. On the other hand, contrary to Williams, Crabbe does not propose simple humanitarian solutions for the poor. In fact, by simultaneously appropriating and disowning the genre of pastoral, addressing plural audiences, questioning structures of authority, and constantly shifting perspectives, *The Village* gains a more systemic insight into the changing economic conditions of many classes in late eighteenth-century rural Britain.

II. Co-Opting and Critiquing Pastoral Traditions

The eighteenth century witnessed a growing movement of laboring-class writers of pastoral, from Stephen Duck to John Clare. Many of these authors, as Bridget Keegan notes, used "language comparable to that of 'polite authors'… whom they are said to imitate" (7). Yet, Keegan claims many of these laboring-class writers mastered such conventions as the prospect view while subtly "transforming them, producing… a hybrid discourse" that allows them to admit the mediation and even alienation of nature that occurs through writing while also "challenging or overcoming their own marginalization" (ibid). Crabbe's allusion to Duck situates him in the emerging tradition of laboring-class pastoral even as the poem's later encomium to his patron positions him in the more aristocratic tradition of pastoral. Thus, Crabbe takes advantage of the dialectic that exists between these two on-going traditions within the genre.

Beth Nelson writes that, "in large part, Crabbe's troubles as a poet were the consequence of the decline of the genre system, a decline related… to the failing authority of the doctrine of imitation" (25). Nelson views Crabbe's marginalized reputation, which was diminishing in his

own lifetime, resulting from the failure of the very system that his poetic arguments in *The Village* helped to undermine. Though Crabbe attempts to register a resistance to the staid formalities of genre, especially as they are merely imitative, his work also depends upon a readership that is alive to the possibilities of—and deviations from—generic conventions. For Nelson, Crabbe is primarily a satirist, though, given her understanding of satire's dependence on playing off the conventions of previous literary works, she indicates that her understanding of satire is close to parody. Ironically, then, Crabbe's parody of pastoral in *The Village* attacks obedience to generic rules from the vantage that these rules fail to mirror the reality of the situation they pretend to depict. Crabbe's work trades on the differences between the idyllic fictions represented by previous pastoral texts and the harsh economic realities encountered by the lower classes, literary imitation and mimesis of social events.

One overlooked feature of the poetic argument of *The Village* is that the first part begins by setting up an explicit dialectic. The third verse paragraph ends by asking the rhetorical question, "From truth and nature shall we widely stray, / Where Virgil, not where fancy, leads the way?" (1: 157). Crabbe's succinct answer, which begins the next stanza, is "Yes" (ibid). Here is a frank, though partly ironic, admission that the poem will deviate from truth and nature in order to fulfill bookish protocol. Notably, these are lines Johnson amended; as Ronald B. Hatch writes, "in the original, Crabbe had said that the poet would be mistaken if he followed either Virgil or his 'Fancy'" (6). By accepting Johnson's changes, however, the passage becomes more complex, and Crabbe acknowledges that fancy allusions and empirical observations—fantasies and realities—will be united in his poem. Few can "share / the poet's rapture and the peasant's care," (ibid) but Crabbe, like Stephen Duck before him, will attempt to bridge this divide even if poetic "rapture" has previously caused the pastoral Muse to ignore the "pains" (ibid) of rural

laborers. That "we" of "we widely stray" implicates not only pastoralists—including Crabbe—but the readership, too, in creating a knowingly false picture. But the erring that the poem is led into is a necessary extravagance, a generic requirement that Crabbe is ostentatiously performing. A few stanzas later, the poem asks another rhetorical question: "Then shall I dare these real ills to hide / In tinsel trappings of poetic pride?" (1: 158). The answer this time is a firm "No" (ibid). It is Hazlitt's "tinsel of words" that Crabbe is suspicious will produce a rhetoric dazzle, blinding us to genuine human suffering. This affirmation of pastoral tradition—"I grant indeed that fields and flocks have charms / for him that grazes or for him that farms" (ibid)—and simultaneous negation of its contemporaneous political import demonstrates a fraught position: Crabbe seeks to work within a given discourse but to challenge the valence of the myths that representations within that tradition have created.

The Village thus reveals the shifts in general aesthetic outlooks and the generic rifts that were transforming pastoral from an elegant neoclassical set-piece with an aristocratic pedigree into a forum for Romanticism's identification with the abject and lower-class. Crabbe claims that neoclassical or Virgilian pastoral has degenerated into "mechanic echo[es]" of "themes so easy" they ask "no deep thought" (1: 157-158). The ease of the pastoral shepherd has been conflated with the easiness of writing and reading about such figures. The circulation of idylls occurs in a brainless vacuum, Crabbe claims, by poets whose vocation requires no work. Pastoral has degenerated into an empty rhetorical machine that simply repeats itself even as that repetition further depletes the possibilities of meaningfulness within the genre. Alfred Ainger remarks that *The Village* is an elaboration of Crabbe's feelings that Augustan pastorals, which his father read him as a boy, possessed a striking "unreality and [the] consequent worthlessness of the

conventional pictures of rural life," (19) not a specific response to Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village*, as many continue to understand Crabbe's poem.

Significantly, however, both *The Deserted Village* and *The Village* had lines touched up in manuscript by Samuel Johnson. In Crabbe's case, Johnson emended lines 15-20, accepted by Crabbe, which, Neil Powell writes, "refines a classically allusive passage that is not at all characteristic of the poem as a whole" (91). Typical for Crabbe apologists, Powell's reading of the poem emphasizes the realist counter-pastoral over the elements of classical decorum and reference that equally—and equivocally—inform the poem. Nevertheless, it is the tension between these two that Powell notes when he states, "It is the inwardness of Crabbe's identification with his subject [the rural poor] which singles him out, coupled with the equally astonishing fact that the author is no peasant-poet but the Duke of Rutland's chaplain" (93). That double identification allows Crabbe to write a work that is at once an elegant pastoral and one of its most caustic reprisals in the realist mode. The conventional elements of pastoral are appropriated, rendered as pastiche, and explicitly lampooned within the poem. Rather than discounting the neoclassical gestures of the poem as residual habits of the age or denigrating them as compromising the poem's more revolutionary import, then, we need to evaluate them as part of the poem's artful and strategic design, enacting the structural and ironic dialectic of class interests that the poem represents.

Crabbe mocks the stock figures of nymphs and Corydons that populate Augustan pastorals as a deceptively pretty "rehearsal" of classical conventions, which obscures "real ills" (1: 158). Nonetheless, Crabbe's poem does not simply reject such classical conventions outright. Instead, it self-parodically employs the neoclassical diction of "nymphs" and "swains" as an emphatic rebuke, "exposing most, when most it gilds distress" (1: 159). Crabbe's work may be

called a pastiche in more than one sense: it both draws on a medley of sources that undergird pastoral and, by exaggerating its imitation of them, offers a poem that indicts the genre as being a hollow echo. The poem drags out the whole idyllic clothes chest, dressing itself up in the finery of pastoral costumes in order to reveal the underlying poetic custom's shabbiness and poverty; it undoes conventions by showing them overdone. "The outward splendour" (ibid) that the supposedly rural nymphs and swains display connects them to an aristocratic court, who cover up the injustice of society even as they leave peasant laborers exposed in rags.

The landscape's "wither'd ears"—of corn, presumably—are thereby identified with the decadence in contemporaneous depictions of landscape: readers and writers of pastoral have lost their "ear" for poetry (1: 159). The literal exploitation of the earth for the benefit of the upper classes, which leads to a depleted harvest, is coextensive with the devaluation, by those in power, of any discourse that accurately depicts the landscape as less than bountiful. Crabbe's narrator, however, criticizes the "tinsel trappings of poetic pride" (1: 158) that would obscure the hardness of rural labor behind soft and liquid sounds. The mellifluous fictions of such poetry are again analogized to gaudy sumptuary shifts, a literal cover up, which also imply a trap or subterfuge.

As if to alleviate doubt about the poem's appropriation of outmoded conventions, Crabbe's narrator declares that his own poetic employment will be guided by the example of the "other shepherds"—real ones who sweat rather than fake ones who swoon—"as truth would paint it, and as bards will not" (1: 158). Nonetheless, the verb "paint" colors his comments with an undertone of irony. Landscapes are never the land itself: they are painted, framed, and mediated as a representation. To see the land in terms of landscape is already to take a proprietorial viewpoint, using the actual ground for one's aesthetic groundwork. Paint also insinuates falseness, an ornamental make-up, so that Crabbe's narrator evacuates his own claim

while making it, acknowledging that he, too, is only another bard offering his labor's spoils if not, indeed, engaging in the spoiled labor of idle writing.

Paradoxically, Crabbe's insistence on using these outworn conventions is contrasted to his focus on the abject and dispossessed so that the very poverty of pastoral conventions helps to foreground the real poverty of the populace in the English countryside. The poem contrasts the gilded diction of neoclassical poems with the homely, yet more botanically accurate, names for flora, which stand out as far more poetic than so-called "poetic" diction. Crabbe's narrator speaks of a countryside scene much like his native Aldeburgh:

> There the blue bugloss paints the sterile soil;
> Hardy and high, above the slender sheaf,
> The slimy mallow waves her silky leaf;
> O'er the young shoot the charlock throws a shade… (1: 159)

The indigenous flowers are pictured in a landscape that is at once "sterile" and riotous with blooms—themselves ambiguous emblems, characterized as both "slimy" and "silky." The shoots of agricultural crops are overtaken by a deathly "shade" of the weed charlock, yet the image seems redolent of an efflorescent pasture of natural abundance with a cooling shade from summer's heat. The bugloss "paints" the soil, which is subsequently directly linked to a nymph, painted in false colors, as if the entire description of the landscape became an epic simile: "So looks the nymph whom wretched arts adorn, / Betray'd by man, then left for man to scorn; / Whose cheek in vain assumes the mimic rose" (ibid). The nymph concatenates Crabbe's concerns, representing the many forms that exploitation takes. Exploitation of the land and its

workers is likened to the exploitation of females by unscrupulous men, who scorn the woman for the downfall they have caused, though the analogy comes full circle: the nymph "assumes the mimic rose." The mimic rose refers to the rosy cheeks by which the slattern unsuccessfully attempts to beguile men after she has been betrayed into the position of a "fallen woman," but likewise glances back to the deflowered, weed-choked landscape, as well.

However, the nymph also recalls Crabbe's earlier use of "nymph" (1: 158) as a term to conjure the inaccuracy of bucolic idealizations, so that both prostitution and pastoral writing are likened together as a "wretched art" (1: 159). This similitude is pursued further: "The happy youth assumes the common strain, / A nymph his mistress, and himself a swain… / But all, to look like her, is painted fair" (1: 158). The nymph's false paint returns us to the indictment of those poets who would falsely paint nymphs in the first place, mindlessly mimicking pastoral models that have lost touch with reality. The strain is "common" because it rehearses stock themes, but also because it makes the mistress—along with the pastoral conventions of which she is a part—common, cheap, and contemptible. The genre depicts flora in rose-colored shades just as nymphs tint themselves with blush for rogues: both perniciously gloss nature.

Nonetheless, *The Village* insists on partaking in the pastoral mode that it critiques. Crabbe portrays the villagers along the coast as unsociable (and therefore, according to traditional late eighteenth-century morality, vice-ridden), rather than representing the pleasantries of peasants in happier—if entirely fictive—pastures:

> Here joyous roam a wild amphibious race,
> With sullen woe display'd in every face;
> Who, far from civil arts and social fly,

And scowl at strangers with suspicious eye.

Here too the lawless merchant of the main

Draws from his plough th' intoxicated swain. (1: 159)

The poor here are "joyous" and "sullen" at once, perhaps because they are free to be wild, yet they thereby fail to have the social forces of the law knit them into a larger community. Their "amphibious" character not only distinguishes their position as a people that live between sea and land, but announces their liminal status both within the village that is the poem's theme and outside that proverbial village's laws, creating isolation and cultural poverty that parallels their isolated and impoverished land. Neil Powell states, "Just as the nymphs have turned to prostitution, so the swains have become smugglers, whom it was Crabbe's father's job to intercept" (96). The swains—no longer plowing their fields—have been intoxicated by the prospect of finding easy wealth on the seas as dubious smugglers; they are also literally intoxicated, their heads a-swim with liquorish thoughts. Laborers have been abandoned by legal and moral structures, signaling a widespread upheaval due to the effects of trade and the early industrial revolution on the countryside's populace. Lawless merchants supplant social linkages; suspicion replaces sociability.

Against this depiction, Crabbe juxtaposes an idyllic pastoral vision to make the economic and moral loss of the scene appear starker in relief. The narrator asks, "where are the swains, who, daily labour done," play rural sports:

While some huge Ajax, terrible and strong,

Engaged some artful stripling of the throng,

And fell beneath him, foil'd, while far around

Hoarse triumph rose, and rocks return'd the sound? (1: 160)

The passage invokes a contest in the golden age between Ajax and the more "artful stripling" Odysseus while putting that allusion in mock-heroic context since he incongruously compares the epic battle to peasants playing a game of quoits. The sidelong reference to Ajax may also recall Sophocles' version of the Homeric myth where a bedraggled Ajax awakes under the spell of Athena to quixotically slaughter a flock of sheep, imagining they are his Achaean enemies. In this version, the epic battle is already transformed into an anti-pastoral that represents the failure of the shepherd to be the emblem of a well-ruled community.

The Village reveals that the same ideological forces that create woolly-headed, sycophantic verse likewise help authorities pull the wool over the eyes of the sheepish populace. Crabbe therefore uses the pastoral tradition to critique itself—and, by extension, the aristocratic structures with which it is aligned—since pastoral, as far back as Virgil and Theocritus, has had a political dimension reflecting larger institutional structures. Without going too far afield, it is clear that not only does the classical pastoral shepherd analogize characters of higher rank, but the form of the bucolic agon presents a contestation, where each voice echoes and rebuts the other. The genre of pastoral itself, as continued by Virgil and others, also takes the form of echoing and rebutting previous voices. Echoing is not, ipso facto, an inherently conservative gesture.[6] It upsets and reinterprets what it supposedly replicates. As such, echoing is inscribed in Crabbe's poem as "returned… sound," so that no matter how much a mock- or anti-pastoral text

[6] Crabbe's description of shepherds on the coast lured to maritime exploits is echoed, in turn, by later pastorals engaged in social critique, such as Charlotte Smith's long pastoral poem "Beachy Head," which depicts ruthless shepherds luring merchant vessels in for shipwrecks.

wishes to displace previous pastoral idealizations, Crabbe recognizes that it is still a transmission, even if a transmutation, of generic tropes. The difference of the echo is nonetheless as important in Crabbe's case as its similitude to previous exemplars. Moreover, his echoes reflect the anti-pastoral discourse that is already contained in pastoral traditions, i.e., Sophocles' rewriting of Ajax.

III. Attacks on Social and Poetic Authority

The Village portrays the hypocrisy of institutional authority, not only attacking the sham discourses of medicine, religion, and law, but revealing how such doublespeak has infected the institution of poetry, as well. Crabbe himself was not only a poet, but trained as a professional surgeon, and later, as a curate. His satire of these institutions therefore reflects his own frustrations as an outsider begging his way among richer and more powerful men for aid and patronage. The doctor in the poem is portrayed, for example, as "all pride and business, bustle and conceit… a potent quack long versed in human ills" (1: 165). "Conceit" may refer to poetic conceits, especially when coupled with the doctor being "versed" in human ills. The doctor's "call" is both a house-call and a higher calling by the Muses, which "echoes round the walls" when "Anon, a figure enters, quaintly neat" (ibid). Though anon literally means "instantly," (OED) it could also hint at some unknown writer; likewise, "figure" could be both a person and a trope while "quaintly neat" could describe a country doctor's appearance or a pastoral in heroic couplets. The doctor's "echoes" seem aligned with the "mechanic echo[e]s of the Mantuan song" (1: 157) mentioned previously. Hence, the cumulative effect of the passage depicts the doctor as employing a discourse that has been corrupted much like poetry's, as he likewise overlooks human suffering for self-serving ends.

Similarly, the parish priest is linked to poetry through the familiar trope of the shepherd as a "shepherd of a different stock" (1: 165). Crabbe ironizes the pastoral leisure of the priest by saying that the priest thinks that his small "Sunday task" is enough work for him, and "the rest he gives to loves and labours light, / to fields the morning, and to feasts the night" (ibid). While the populace to whom he preaches must work all week, the parish priest is like a shepherd in his relative idleness and "rest." The poem insinuates that he courts "light" lovers since the epithet "light" may govern both "labour" and "loves." Indeed, he gambols in fields of sport—and perhaps plays the sexual field—since "none [is] better skill'd… to urge [the noisy pack's] chase," which again conflates hounding vexatious foxes and hunting fashionable vixens (ibid). The priest is petulant to be called away from his games:

> Sure in his shot, his game he seldom mist,
> And seldom fail'd to win his game at whist;
> Then, while such honours bloom around his head,
> Shall he sit sadly by the sick man's bed… (1: 165-166)

Hunting, gambling, social engagements, and possibly courtship gain him ironic laurels even while he neglects his duty. The priest at a sick man's bedside "raise[s] the hope he feels not," (1: 166) just as the vain shepherd boys mentioned at the poem's beginning only lament "amorous pains… they never feel" (1: 157). Both types of shepherds are adept at performing displays of sentiment that lack any basis in genuine emotion. The priest's leisure is likened to a rake's. The shopworn analogy of the shepherd as a spiritual guide from the psalms is turned on its head: the

pastor is inverted into the passionate shepherd of Renaissance, or the run-amok goat-boy of classical, pastoral rather than Biblical convention.

Finally, the figure of the judge is called a "grave justice," who "recites… the law's vast volume" (1: 170). The gravity of the judge, sheltered behind the law's decorum, belies that the judge—like the doctor and priest—is merely a gravedigger condemning the poor to untimely lots:

> He who recites, to keep the poor in awe,
> The law's vast volume—for he knows the law.—
> To him with anger or with shame repair
> The injur'd peasant and deluded fair.
> Lo! at his throne the silent nymph appears,
> Frail by her shape, but modest in her tears;
> And while she stands abash'd, with conscious eye,
> Some favourite female of her judge glides by,
> Who views with scornful glance the strumpet's fate,
> And thanks the stars that made her keeper great:
> Near her the swain, about to bear for life
> One certain evil, doubts 'twixt war and wife;
> But, while the faultering damsel takes her oath,
> Consents to wed, and so secures them both. (ibid)

The judge "recites" the law much as one might recite a poem, a mechanical citation divorced from its context, a commonplace that can be adapted to any purpose. The volume's

very vastness casts ironic doubt that the judge does indeed "know the law" (ibid). Rather, the judge knows how to manipulate everyone's ignorance of the law (including his own) by citing it piecemeal for egomaniacal purposes, as the saucy glance of his kept mistress indicates. The judge's ability to recite, in the absence of any definitive textual meaning of the nearly endless whole, the *de facto* authority that keeps all poor and "the poor in awe" (ibid). Just as the recitation of the law is divorced from knowledge and justice, the recitation of Augustan pastoral has lost touch with reality. The judge oppresses the poor with the semblance of prestige and knowledge, and though they "repair" (ibid) to him, he is intent on keeping the system broken.

The far from impartial judge uses his position to excuse his favorite mistress while executing a harsh dole on a different "nymph" (1: 170) who consorted with a peasant. The less favored "strumpet" must agree to marry her lover in order that both may escape punishment—though Crabbe hints that marriage itself is also a punishment: "one certain evil, doubts 'twixt war and wife" (ibid). The alliteration between "war" and "wife" indicates that the husband's fate is much the same whether he ships out to combat or stoops to domestic battles on the home front in the war of the sexes. Meanwhile, the judge's "favourite female… thanks the stars that made her keeper great," (ibid) pointing out that whether one's destiny is sunny or star-crossed depends mostly on chance even as the term "keeper" indicates that she is an unwitting prisoner despite her seemingly favored status. The judge is said to sit on a "throne," (ibid) making his arbitrary sentences a tyrannical sovereign power, affecting not only war and law writ large but, more insidiously, the micro-practices of politics in the private sphere.

Though Crabbe attacks corrupt authorities in the guise of the pastoral muse, and vice versa, he also recognizes an authentic yet abject authority figure, whom he likens to a good shepherd. The feeble old man is said "like a monarch" to have "ruled the little court" of the

children's games (1: 166). The meaning of "court" shifts between a ball court for sporting and a disporting aristocratic court, using a play on words that turns the latter into the former. The old man is also called a "man of many sorrows," (ibid) linking him to the exegetical tradition of the suffering Christ derived from Isaiah 53.3. Also in this context, the old man's association with the children recalls Matthew 19.14, as the man is surrounded by innocents. Upon the old man's death, "the village children now their games suspend," (1: 166) indicating that the demise of this "monarch" inaugurates a suspension in the law, the rules of the game. Nonetheless, the children's suspension of law is portrayed as a legitimate observance, akin to a valid declaration of a state of emergency. This is shown through their marching "hand in hand" (ibid) to the gravesite, a mark of their community's sociability and mutual cooperation: no one abuses the power of having, as it were, the upper hand. The priest, however, habitually "defers his duty," (ibid) abusing the suspension of the rule of law, which leaves "the poor man's bones… unblest" (1: 167). The unconsecrated bones of the good man ironically expose the literal corruption of a society where worldly power has broken away from its auratic basis in sacrificial laws even while the unholy neglect of his remains ironically exemplifies the good man's martyrdom.

In fact, the priest himself is a "sportsman," who also "devot[es] his nights to play," (1: 166) demonstrating a superficial similarity to the children, which only makes explicit their more authentic differences: whereas the children's games depict their simplicity, the priest's gambling and gamesmanship is a sign of his sophistry. Throughout, the poem presents a series of equivalences—between doctor and poet, priest and amorous shepherd, and the judge as tyrant versus the feeble old man as Christ—brought about by equivocations in Crabbe's language. One figure becomes the model for another even as the poem explores the cultural logic in which the image of the satyr supplants the shepherd; the quack countermands the doctor; the rhetorician

substitutes for the poet; the hypocrite replaces the priest; and the bully shifts for the judge. Authority is undermined and inverted, most especially the authority of the crooked, antiquated muse of pastoral. *The Village* reveals that neoclassical idylls depend on idealized analogies, such as Christ depicted as the good shepherd as opposed to the indolent gadabout shepherds represented in the bucolic tradition of the classics.[7] By trading on these two figurations of the shepherd, however, the poem becomes troubling, as the juxtaposition of contrary valuations of the same trope in such close proximity within the work results in a self-parody.

IV. Part Two of *The Village*: Poetry's Various Purposes

The second part of the poem switches modes while continuing to equivocate, offering elegiac praise to the patron's dead brother. In this section of the poem, in contrast to the more satiric first part, the poem praises the ability of poetry to obscure reality. Since the pain one feels, on such an occasion as a death, may be too much to bear, *The Village* celebrates the way poetry's "soothing numbers make [grief] less" (1: 172). Thus, poetry's power of illusion is praised along with the exemplary status of the patron: the patron may support poetry much as poetry itself serves to support the reader in times of dejection. Many critics see the two parts of *The Village* as contradictory, often dismissing the second part since Manners appears to be an unquestioned "noble chief." Caryn Chaden, writing only a few years ago, is typical in her dismissal: "If Part I of *The Village* shows a sympathy for the laboring poor unprecedented in Augustan literature, Part II shares the same dark view of flawed humanity as… [other] Augustan works" (308). She echoes the complaint of Edmund Cartwright, whose notice in the *Monthly Review* upon the

[7] Samuel Johnson, in fact, faulted Milton's "Lycidas" for its uncouth blending of Biblical shepherds with classical ones; he also attacked pastoral more generally, calling it, "easy vulgar, and therefore disgusting." Perhaps Crabbe, aware of Johnson's judgment, exacerbates the hybrid traditions that shepherds and other pastoral figures partake in as a way to disrupt the genre's stately, smoothed-over decorum. That is, Crabbe's rough handling of the latent contradictions in different pastoral traditions is a Shklovskian "defamiliarization" technique.

poem's initial publication, tersely states, "the second part contradicts the assertion of the first" (43). Such critics fail to understand that the poem's meaning is actually revealed by this apparent cleavage: the poem is incorrigibly plural, rather than a pusillanimous concession to the powers that be. The second part's elegy quiets grief just as the first part's satire reveals folly.

Similarly, the real difference between the vices of country and city, the narrator claims, is that one group "disguise[s] too little, [the other] too much" (1: 170). The poem—neither wholly of the city nor the country—negotiates its generic masks of elegy and encomium, pastoral and satire, in order to fulfill poetry's function of both exposing corruption *and* obscuring pain. Despite its scathing critique of hypocrisy, the poem nevertheless acknowledges a place for poetry's linguistic counterfeits in helping to control and tame the emotions. In fact, the poem's praise of Manners (and perhaps, manners) is one of those places where it embodies a bait-and-switch, a rhetorical tergiversation that may seem at cross-purposes, in order to more fully represent different class perspectives and poetic functions.

The depiction of Manners, a young aristocrat, which the poem calls a "noble chief," (1: 171) is deliberately contrasted to the fanciful old "chief" (1: 162)—symbol of the worn-out rural poor—who dies unblessed in the poem's first part. On the one hand, Manner's untimely death seems to have saved him from the fate of the feeble old man (who likewise triumphed in his youth), thus allowing the poem to bless Manner's promise if not his achievements. On the other hand, there is an ironic coloring as the poem acknowledges its shift from lamenting the condition of the old and poor to mourning someone who was young and rich. The poem begins its second half with the line, "No longer truth, though shown in verse, disdain," (1: 168). The wobbly syntax winks to the reader that what follows might no longer claim to represent the truth. Yet, even if what follows is a conveniently versified fiction, the reader is exhorted not to entirely

disdain it—gritty realism may be forsaken for writing that has other goals. The poem praises itself as a "glorious labor of the soul," (1: 173). Though the poem asks Manners "what verse can praise thee or what work repay," it answers that "Yet Verse (in all we can) they worth repays" (1: 172). The question, however, seems directed not so much toward the dead aristocrat as toward the nature of the work—and worth—of poetry, especially since it is unlikely that "the Muse shall mourn" (ibid) Manners, rather than manners.

Crabbe's praise of Robert Manners seems to rely on the logic that, by forsaking aristocratic leisure to fight and eventually die for his country in the Navy, he sacrificed more pleasures and received more hardships than those that hard-bitten rustic plowmen experience: Manners "gave up pleasures you could never share, / For pain which you are seldom doom'd to bear" (1: 171). Yet, the tribute soon becomes ambivalent where it is at all specific, the compliments subtly backhanded: Manners is compared to a "tall oak" that guards the "subject wood" below, felled by a sudden stroke of lightning (ibid). The tree cast "ample shade," protecting the "subject wood" (ibid) from the fierce rays of the sun; yet the lines also hint that Manner's life may best be remembered for the "shade" it cast by his early death. The "fiery bolt" that lands on the tree's "head" seems reminiscent of a punishment by the gods, or a crown so heavy it cannot be withstood (ibid). The symbol of the tree as part of a family tree—since Manners is Rutland's brother—is made explicit near the very end of the poem:

> See other Rutlands, other Granbys there;
> And as thy thoughts through streaming ages glide,
> See other heroes die as Manners died;

> And from their fate thy race shall nobler grow,
>
> As trees shoot upward that are prun'd below. (1: 173)

While Crabbe tells his patron Rutland that his noble family "tree" will continue to rise, he claims that the death of Manners is a mere pruning from below, hardly robust encomium. Likewise, the very image of a smooth stream which the poem mocks at its beginning ironically comes back as no less than the calming waters of the Thames. The river, too, moves onward, even though some of its "branches" run dry or are cut short: the river, a symbol of England, is thereby identified with Rutland's family tree. While the river's "power increases and its use improves," (1: 174) Rutland's lineage will similarly increase in power and "improve" the land. Yet mention of the river's "warbling" and streams "by art cut off" (1: 173) also align the river with a national poetic tradition, situating Crabbe's effort in terms of its more aristocratic influences, most notably Pope, who also ends *Windsor Forest* with an image of the Thames. Pope's imperialist sentiments can be discerned in such lines as: "Unbounded *Thames* shall flow for all mankind, / Whole nations enter with each swelling tyde." As Windsor Forest is a metonym for the British nation as a whole, the Thames is aggrandized into a universal solvent, liquidating all other countries. Crabbe's image of the Thames, instead, continues to flow on even as it sweeps away even those who pay tribute to it, especially since he attempts to point out the absurdity of pastoralists like Pope, who writes that he is "pleas'd in the silent shade with empty praise." Both parts of poem are alike, then, in that *The Village* constantly shifts its values, offering latent irony in any of the perspectives that it appears to take.

V. Addressing (and Redressing) Several Readerships

Perhaps the poem's insistence on plurality can best be seen in its changes of address, which switch from courtly "gentle souls" (1: 162) to the poor of "humbler friends" (1: 168) to the "thou" of Manners and then "thine" (1: 172) of the patron himself. Unlike a figure of apostrophe that speaks to no one, Crabbe's use of address reaches out to actual, plural readerships. It decidedly marks the poem as inhabiting a space that is accessed by multivalent audiences who will each read the poem's figures differently, each reader being ironized against the others. Crabbe can thus critique and celebrate the use of such poetic conventions without becoming hypocritical himself through a self-parodic gesture of pointing to audiences with different values and to different pragmatic uses for poetry or pastoral discourse.

In fact, the address to "ye, oppress'd" is not to the poor, but sarcastically to gouty aristocrats: "Say, ye oppress'd by some fantastic woes, / Some jarring nerve that baffles your repose" (1: 164). The "fantastic woes" are only the self-aggrandizing anxiety and hypochondria that plague the upper classes with fashionable diseases wrought by their leisure to indulge in pure fantasy. This mock oppression is then contrasted to the "real pain" (ibid) of the laboring poor, whose suffering paradoxically offers the "cure" (ibid) that the aristocrats seek for their phantasmal qualms. Work both gives pain to the peasants and relives pain for the peers. The poem's ironic address thus hints at the imbalance in the distribution of work, which hurts all members of society.

Likewise, when Crabbe's narrator addresses "Ye gentle souls, who dream of rural ease, / Whom the smooth stream and smoother sonnet please," (1: 162) he is chiding aristocratic gentlemen who idealize the landscape, first in terms of the so-called "improvement" movement that sought to correct topography into more useful or pleasingly bucolic scenes and second in terms of ignoring both nature and the nature of economic injustices through circulating pastoral

writing that would smooth over such harsh realities. "Rural ease" remains only an idle dream—a false consciousness abetted by material and literary exploitation—predicated on aristocratic privilege, as mention of the courtly genre of the sonnet indicates. Sonnets were a glib medium to package acceptable idealizations, which had already received derision and self-parodic treatment by the late Renaissance for the conventionality of such techniques as the blazon and volta. Crabbe's poem—though not a sonnet—does take the form of impeccable couplets in iambic pentameter, vacillating between a heroic pastoral such as *Windsor Forest* and a mock epic style. Frank Whitehead, in his reassessment of Crabbe, remarks, in fact, that despite the poem's "proclaimed antipastoral determination," *The Village* fits "in comfortably enough with the prevailing pattern of late Augustan poetic trends" (22-23).

The smoothness of Crabbe's poetic numbers simultaneously fulfills a generic requirement and is repeatedly foregrounded as a problematic dissimulation, a falsifying urbanity that gives a fluid polish that could hide thornier, more crabbed truths underneath.[8] Coventry Patmore accuses Crabbe of sometimes producing a "vile newspaper prose" (cribbing Hazlitt) to which "he not only added the ghastly adornment of verse, but also frequently enlivened it with the 'poetic licenses' and Parnassian 'lingo' of the Pope period" (466). In *The Village*, however, Crabbe deliberately employs such measures in order to better disavow them—and deconstruct the uses that such pomp or pabulum may be put to.

When the narrator turns to address "ye humbler friends," (1: 168) he seems to speak both to the impoverished characters his poem has just depicted and to potential lower-class readers.

[8] Patmore claims Crabbe's "lines often resemble the strokes of Dryden's sledge-hammer rather than the stings of [Pope's] cane" (466). Patmore seems to derive his metaphor of Crabbe's metric percussiveness from Tennyson, who is claimed to have said, "There is a tramp, tramp, tramp, a merciless sledge-hammer thud about his lines which suits his subjects" (368). The violence of the accent is nonetheless appropriate for the blow the verse aims to strike against it satiric targets, Tennyson suggests. The successive tramp and thud countermands the versified smoothness, grounding the poem in an earthier cadence, and allowing it cover more ground, than its correct measures might indicate by mere footwork alone. Even in his versification, Crabbe manages both to reduplicate neoclassical patterns and to repudiate them by roughing them up a bit; he abides by older conventions while bidding them good riddance.

This address likewise anticipates the lower-class workers milling in front of the church after the Sunday sermon, which are mentioned later, "where loitering stray a little tribe of friends" (ibid). The loitering and straying already foreshadow that these so-called friends who have recently been released from being pent up in the pews have more devious designs—indeed, even the epithet "tribe" recalls the amphibious tribe of antisocial smugglers (1: 160) rather than the innocent young friends of the old man of sorrows. In addressing "ye humbler friends," the poem recognizes an ambivalence about the term friends, who may be false friends or genuine. Crabbe tells these humbler friends to "enjoy your hour," which is "Heaven's gift to weary men oppress" (1: 169), contrasting the oppression of man by men to the ironic beneficence of God—ironic because this "seems the type of their expected rest," implying not a holiday or Sabbath but death. Yet, Crabbe pulls back from one irony only to deliver another: these nominal "joys" of rest (ibid) will not even last the day since vice is already threatening to cause dissension among the supposed friends. Crabbe's narrator thus wavers between sermonizing and sympathizing.

Though the narrator often seems to take the side of the laboring classes in his poem, each time he directly addresses his laboring class audience, it is to admonish them. The narrator warns, "Nor you, ye poor, of letter'd scorn complain, / To you the smoothest song is smooth in vain," (1: 158) at once criticizing neoclassical poems for their finicky smoothness and chastising the lower class for their inability to appreciate its finer points. The subtleties of versification are wrought in vain for the unlettered poor, but laborers have their own rightful scorn for the vanity of poems. Much later in *The Village*, the narrator addresses the laboring class reader, "And you, ye poor, who still lament your fate, / Forbear to envy those you call the great" (1: 171). Again, the narrator's address is a sign that the tables have been turned: instead of using address to elicit solidarity or identification, the explicit solicitation to a class of readers is used to oppose their

class assumptions. Yet, even here, the word "call" reminds us that the nobility are "great" only in name. In fact, Crabbe goes on to say that the upper classes are also "victims of distress," (ibid) attempting to inculcate his lower-class reader's sympathy for them. In this way, the poem repeatedly uses a strategy of distanciation of its various audiences, entreating particular class-based readerships only to oppose their probable beliefs and values.

Besides the generalized upper- and lower-class readership that the poem variously addresses, there is also a specific invocation to Rutland, Crabbe's patron, within the poem, as well as an apostrophe to Death. In his address to Rutland, the narrator claims that Virtue shall sooth the sorrow within his bosom where "she reigns" (1: 172). If virtue "reigns" in Rutland's bosom, it is in contrast to the poem's first line wherein "care" (1: 157) is said to "reign" over the entire village. While the general upshot of the poem implies that such "care" is synonymous with hardship, the ending reverses that reading so that the import of the first line could also mean that the community is well cared for by its sovereign, Rutland. Then again, the true sovereign that reigns in the village may be Death:

> No more, O Death! thy victim starts to hear
> Churchwarden stern, or kingly overseer;
> No more the farmer claims his humble bow,
> Thou art his lord, the best of tyrants thou! (1: 166)

That Death is specifically called "lord" and—with black humor—"best of tyrants" (ibid) indicates that the apostrophe's juxtaposition with the address to Rutland is part of the structural design of the poem. The line break after "thy victim starts to hear" (ibid) alludes to a possible

resurrection of the old chief, who might "start" back up like Christ, as well as emphasizing the reader's belated recognition of the truths the poem declaims: a reader really listens only against a background of silence and finality. The farmer claiming his "bow" (ibid) could be a paronomasia for the pastoral poet accepting his bough, or laurels, a sprig of recognition which he cultivated himself. Yet, death is the force that ultimately levels and negates other, competing economic, social, or poetic authorities, whether of church or state, muse or sovereign.

Though Crabbe discounts "poetic pride" (1: 158) that seeks immortal instead of material goals, he later remarks, "If Passion rule us, be that passion Pride," (1: 173) offering yet another internal cleavage within the work. The "if" of this statement is quickly followed by another hypothetical, "If Reason, Reason bids us raise/ our fallen hearts" (ibid). A dialectic between fickle passion and self-same reason is developed: pride literally comes before the "fall" in these lines, and reason is asked to pick up the slack when hopes are defeated. The last mention of pride in the poem is likewise equivocal: "Or, old Thames, borne down with decent pride, / Sees his young streams run warbling at his side" (ibid). The "or" is ambiguously both apposition and opposition. On the one hand, the "or" could simply denote a change in metaphorical vehicle for the same tenor—the narrator is switching from a trope about Rutland's family tree, which will strengthen and spread its branches higher, to a figure of the Thames, which consolidates its branches. On the other hand, the "or" could portray a different possibility altogether: Rutland's lineage could be born (bourn) "down" in a descent (decent) from its high source and eventually overtaken by younger upstarts on the margins. In other words, Rutland's aristocratic pedigree will not flourish, but instead become washed out. Similar to the chiasmus in the earlier lines about the poorhouse, "There parents dwell who know no parents' care / Parents who know no children's love, dwell there," (1: 163) there is a reversal that signals the old will become the new

once again, just as the young will see a revolution come full circle with age. That young upstart who supplants Rutland might very well be some poetic progeny of Crabbe himself, who is at once chasing after pride—poetic and otherwise—while chastising it.

In *The Village* poetry has a subversive power that is based not on disguising its own doublespeak but on performing a speech whose double meanings point to the multiplicity of reality. The poem demonstrates how figures of authority rely on their ambiguous figurations, which confound any attempt to suppress the polysemy their own signifiers beget. *The Village* negotiates different addressees, points of view, and purposes of poetry, setting different subject positions off against each other in order to show that any singular stance is inadequate. The poem works the field of "smooth alternate verse" (1: 157) not only to echo but to alter it: veiling and countervailing its tropes, revealing then veering back on its own metaphors instead of simply plowing ahead with an ideological polemic. Crabbe's work is thus "feigning" in the best sense: playful, fabricated, shrouded with meanings, at one moment mimicking and at another mocking, and alive to the various perspectives and poetic possibilities of truth.

Chapter Three

Mock Heroic Drama and Competing Concepts of Masculinity

In British drama from the late seventeenth century to the mid-eighteenth century, a series of plays utilized cleavages between generic conventions to speak to the changing concepts of masculinity. Residual ideals of Christian charity and heroism competed uneasily with still-dominant notions of aristocratic privilege and chivalry, even as a far-reaching commercial ethos emerged that re-envisioned masculinity in terms of industry and interiorized character. In this context, the serious drama of the period struggles to represent a male figure with convincingly tragic or heroic potential; rather, some of the most interesting drama offers characters—both male and female—who play off the contradictions between the different ideological concepts of masculinity that were alive in the cultural matrix at the time.

The late seventeenth century witnessed the beginning of a change in British masculine identity brought about, John Tosh writes, by the "transition from a genteel masculinity grounded in land ownership to a bourgeois masculinity attuned to the market" (219). One facet of that transition, Tosh observes, is "the decline of arms as a facet of masculinity," which, he claims, "bears the unmistakable imprint of bourgeois values in ascendant" (222). The bellicose conquerors bedizened in regimental garb of heroic drama, then, might have a double valence: for some audience members, they could still be the epitome of manhood while for others they might seem overwrought and ridiculous. In short, the empire, which at first demanded soldiers and explorers commissioned by the nobility, created the economic conditions of vibrant trade that replaced such masculine ideals by valorizing the work-ethic and pecuniary rationality of

merchants. The brief vogue of heroic drama and the subsequent popularity of sentimental forms of theatre result in part from this large-scale structural change.

Alongside this transformation, the associations of the foppish libertine underwent re-evaluation, as well: "though the characteristic effeminacy identified with the fop at the beginning of the Restoration was a comic hallmark of his lack of social sophistication more so than an indication of sexual preference," writes Andrew P. Williams, "effeminacy in males grew with the new century as culturally suspect" (166). Effeminacy, however, may be too relative and ill-defined a term to denote the constellation of behaviors and values that eighteenth-century society increasingly condemned in the fop, especially as one of the comic figures replacing the fop was the bourgeois man of feeling who populated sentimental comedies. The difference between these two "effeminate" archetypes may be a function of how class inflected gendered representations. The man of feeling focused on domestic rather than homosocial activity, emphasized respectability rather than sexual license, and operated from bureaucratic more often than aristocratic or personal authority. Though feminine in many of his traits by today's standards, the man of feeling nevertheless embodied many of the emerging middle-class values of manhood.

Though shifts in masculine archetypes due to economic and political factors can take place over decades and centuries, the more turbulent fluctuations in theatrical fashions may be attributed to the more rapidly changing composition of the audiences. Andrew P. Williams notes that "court circles and the beneficiaries of royal patronage were extremely influential on the Restoration stage… but at century's end, the dwindling economic power of the gentry had greatly compromised that influence" (170). As the mercantile class became a more prominent sector of the theatre-going public, their values became reflected in what reached the stage. This is neither to say that the vicissitudes of taste played no role in determining the shape of new

plays nor that audiences failed to understand theatrical representations as sets of conventions disassociated from the standards they applied to morality in life. But the upheaval in social structures, and its concomitant effect on gender and class identities, may also have altered the very reasons that audiences went to the playhouses and the types of pleasures they hoped to obtain there. With the advent of the anti-theatrical attacks in the late seventeenth century, the playhouse began to evolve to be less a convivial meeting place, conceived primarily as an alluring spectacle of both performers and play-goers, and more a moral proving grounds, directed to emulation or sympathetic response to the actors on stage.

In this regard, "for the four decades between 1680 and 1720," Jean I. Marsden writes, the heroines of she-tragedies "defined tragedy as drama turned away from the masculine heroics of an earlier age" (192). Although the virtuous yet fallen woman largely comported to the classical tragic trajectory, these plays revealed the culturally ambiguous ideas of female desire and how much complicity women had with their male sexual assailants. The figuration of this ambiguity perhaps followed from women's dual status as both property and agents: the pathos of the autonomous subject contrasted with the ascription of her body as (literally) damaged goods. On the contrary, male identity became more interiorized in terms of "character," as the Evangelical ideology of the "self-made man" implied, rather than depending on reputation or the actions of others. Hence, the discrepancy between inborn nobility and a tragic fate had less purchase on an audience which posited a strong correlation between a man's social standing and the state of his soul. The gamester, one of the few masculine tragic figures to arise in this period, for instance, signified the mercantile ethos gone awry through a series of disastrous "investments." Macheath and Barnwell, in fact, may be viewed as special cases of this type. Yet, most gamesters elicited pity at best since the downfall of this figure almost inevitably resulted from what audiences

would perceive as his weakness of will or moral turpitude, traits which compromised not only his heroic qualities but—under the bourgeois social construction—threatened the very masculinity that such a figure presumed to embody. Characters such as Macheath, Millwood, Barnwell, Nourhamal, and Indamora can inspire radically different responses. In part, the variety in the theatrical and critical reception of such characters results from the way these characters trouble conventional expectations of type. And yet they are not wholly *sui generis*—their originality lies largely in the ingenious design by which one archetype (whether generic, gendered, or otherwise) is bent into the shape of another to produce a powerful hybrid, a mixture that gives us an unforeseen alloy with new properties. By recognizing the strands of older conventions that these characters and plots reference even as they distort them, we may come to view these dramas afresh, seeing the ways that they demonstrate the tensions of attempting to embody a masculine identity.

Aureng-Zebe is often thought of as ending the tradition of heroic drama. Loosely defined, heroic drama is a variety of "serious" drama, typically following the pattern of tragicomedy, in which conquering heroes spout verse in exotic locales where they are embroiled in impossible conflicts between love and duty. Though the vogue for heroic drama itself was short lived, its reverberations, whether in the spirit of burlesque or as a more tacit generic model, were to be longer lasting and more profound. *Aureng-Zebe* embodies the older heroic drama even as it anticipates both the continuing burlesque of that form and the emergence of later forms such as she-tragedy and sentimental drama. This transitional generic status enables Dryden's last rhymed drama to manifest disparate ideological viewpoints, generating sometimes violently self-parodic effects of both farce and pathos.

While it may be understandable that a substantial reference point for Dryden, even in his "serious" drama, would be Restoration comedy, as he is frequently responding to the court wits, it may be less clear why, over fifty years later Gay and Lillo also take Restoration models as their guiding compass points. Robert D. Hume convincingly demonstrates the paucity of new theatrical works during the mid-1720's through the 1730's: his statistics indicate that 82% of productions at Lincoln's Inn Field and 92% of productions at Drury Lane, the two London playhouses, during the 1726-1727 season, for example, were of plays written in 1707 or before (*Rakish Stage*, 272-311). This conservatism in the theatre world means that Gay and Lillo—as well as their audiences—essentially shared the same dramatic repertoire that informed Dryden's culture, with Restoration warhorses dominating the marketplace. What changed during those intervening years, though, was a host of social and political attitudes, as well as an expanded middle-class theatre-going audience: Gay and Lillo largely wrote from a time that shared many of the dramatic conventions as Dryden, then, but with a different cultural outlook and milieu that lends their works a new coloring. The seeds of generic instability had already been planted by Dryden, and the wholesale transformation of masculinity that followed overturned many of the previously available models for a hero that audiences would find attractive.

Dryden's *Aureng-Zebe* marks a turning point in the drama of the Restoration. "That Dryden abandoned heroic drama after *Aureng-Zebe* is an historical fact; that he radically altered or rejected it within the play is untrue," writes Leslie Howard Martin (306). Martin's response is typical of views on Dryden's play, which either assimilate the work to the conventions of other heroic drama or, as the disputatious tone of his remarks indicate, interpret the work as a censorious departure from the genre, a genre which Dryden previously had done much to create, promote, and defend. By disputing whether *Aureng-Zebe* conforms to the generic criteria largely

set forth by Dryden himself or whether the play marks a critical shift, however, overlooks the way in which the play re-envisions heroic drama, destabilizing the valence of its terms to change it from within. That is, Dryden, in the unenviable position of acknowledging the truculent if often accurate attacks of his critics while also hoping to offer a play that comported to his own dramatic theory, achieved the curious feat of creating a work that is both the ultimate exemplar of heroic drama and simultaneously a self-parodic critique of the genre's excesses and assumptions. The play is at once heroic and mock heroic drama. The authority of its characters—like the determination of the genre of which they are a part—hinges on verbal prowess and rhetoric; yet, language itself is subject to constant reinterpretation throughout the play, as various citations and echoes destabilize the characters' control over their own self-representations.

While Dryden's *Aureng-Zebe* may have effectively ended the heroic drama, Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* was an immediate and unprecedented success. The run—"whether sixty-two or sixty-three nights"—was longer and the box-office receipts "were larger than had ever been known before," writes William Eben Schultz (10). Clearly, the opera struck a nerve. Gay's opera turned previous operatic productions on their head, and subsequently became the prototype of its own genre, the ballad opera. As J.V. Guerinot and Rodney D. Jilg note, "The gorgeous baroque world of Purcell, loftily inhabited by great figures human and divine, has little to do with the realism of Gay, unless one were to argue, perhaps not altogether perversely, that its preoccupations with heroic posturing is reflected in Gay's mock-heroic portrayal of Macheath" (3). This reversal of the traditional aim and materials of opera is only one of many metaleptic revisions that Gay performs in the text, thoroughly perverse as it is. Audiences likely found these formal and generic reversals exciting because they concatenated the various male archetypes that were anxiously contested at the time: the hero (and rogue) Macheath teases the audience by

presenting the characteristics of a Christian hero, an aristocratic gentleman, and a mercantile captain of industry. Yet, each of these types of masculinity is controverted by the others, as well as defeated by its own double: the pusillanimous Christian sheep, the libertine rake, and the blackguard swindler only beholden to his bottom line. Just as the text formally imbues old designs with new meanings through its metaleptic technique, Macheath and Polly simultaneously represent competing norms of gender, troubling the stability of masculine and feminine ideals.

My reading of *The London Merchant* emphasizes the tensions between an increased recognition of an identity group and the circumscription of legible identities to capitalist agendas. By demonstrating how this putatively didactic play troubles the very distinctions that are necessary for its moral convictions, the play can complicate the notions we have of ideology itself. Ideologies are rarely coherent or consistent—and the nexus of material and cultural forces from which they arise often lack stability. On the one hand, *The London Merchant* can be viewed as reinforcing traditional Puritanical gender roles and sexual mores; on the other hand, the commercial ethos of the text ruptures any such easy divisions. It is, surprisingly, also a play giving voice to queer desires and critiquing the hypocrisy of Puritan and mercantile constructions of gender, sexuality, and consumerism. The self-division in the generic construction of *The London Merchant*, however, parallels the conflicts between and within its characters, as they struggle with obeying moral strictures and pursuing their all-consuming desires.

Aureng-Zebe, *The Beggar's Opera,* and *The London Merchant* each offer images of fractured masculine identities embedded in the dilemmas posed by empire. Their heroes and heroines struggle to conform to the strictures imposed by overlapping and contradictory cultural norms. Each of the protagonists also attempts to use the rifts between these norms to escape disciplinary regulation: for example, Aureng-Zebe plays off his loyalty to his father, his lover,

and his country to achieve an eventual coronation; Macheath embodies the romantic hero who transgresses social laws at the same time that he is a cynical social-climber, using both guises to avoid a hanging; and Barnwell is caught between his status as an apprentice and his various illicit desires, a position which he tries to reconcile through his final gesture toward Christian piety. The failures of these characters to achieve heroic ideals results in a mock-heroic—rather than a genuinely tragic—tone. By showing the fraught nature of masculinity, these plays also demonstrate how imperial expansion, and the commercial culture it helped to develop, may be made to look ridiculous in its turn.

(Mock) Heroic Drama and Masculinity in Crisis: Dryden's *Aureng-Zebe*

> Farce would seem to be intended for childlike minds still touched with grossness; but the history of the theater shows us that the opposite is true. Farce has always flourished in ages of refinement and great cultural activity. And the reason lies where one would least expect it: farce is based on logic and objectivity…. Perhaps a wavering among other elements makes it bearable: toward humor, its natural enemy, for humor is the acknowledgement of one's kinship with frailty; toward character-drawing; toward picturesqueness, a static quality; even toward pathos—perhaps all of these are necessary to keep it from the ultimately empty triumph of its two fundamental drives: logic and objectivity.
>
> —Thornton Wilder, "Noting the Nature of Farce"

Dryden's last theatrical work in couplets, *Aureng-Zebe* (1675), uses the instability lurking within the rhetoric of heroic drama as its very premise: it turns the parody of heroic drama in *The Rehearsal* on its head. After experimenting with a dual plot structure that combines genres in

Marriage A-la-Mode, Dryden's *Aureng-Zebe* presents a heroic drama that, although it is "most correct" as Dryden claims in its prologue (14), nonetheless also acts as its own farcical self-parody. The play responds to the dialogic Restoration stage by upending its own assumptions quicker than the audience can cry it down or send it up. *Aureng-Zebe* problematizes the traditional gender roles inscribed in the genre of heroic drama: it portrays the contradictions of empire, as the growing commercial ethos reconceived masculinity, and the play juxtaposes the chivalric colonizer of earlier representations against the emerging (and oxymoronic) bourgeois gentleman. The shifts in rhetorical modes that transpire in *Aureng-Zebe* signal the precariousness of power relations, which rely on verbal contracts that are subject to re-interpretation. Likewise, the play highlights the citational nature of dialogue through restaging similar scenes to display the tractability of meanings vis-à-vis variable contexts. The accelerating plot turns reveal deeply ambiguous characters, and ultimately trouble the import of the seemingly conventional, triumphal ending.

I. The Attack on Heroic Drama in *The Rehearsal,* the Mixed Genres of *Marriage A-la-Mode,* and the Dialogic Restoration Stage

The pastiche of *The Rehearsal* (1671, but updated several times to remain topical) sent up the impossibly grandiloquent rhetoric of Dryden's heroic dramas for comic effect. The Duke of Buckingham, George Villiers, along with his collaborators managed to appropriate lines of Dryden's previous heroic plays for parodic purposes. The characters in Villiers's play claim they cannot make heads or tails of the genre's nonsensical rodomontade. D. E. L. Crane writes that, "Among the many plays, chiefly those in the heroic genre, which were parodied [by *The Rehearsal*], Dryden's work figured most prominently, as must have been instantly evident at

least to the limited and assiduously play-going company" (viii). *The Rehearsal* savages Dryden's heroic plays for their mélange of high-flying bombast; Bayes, the benighted playwright-versifier, views the plot of the play-within-the-play, which is in its last rehearsal, as only an excuse to indulge in flights of poetical fancy or ridiculous pageantry. One scene combines, for instance, fighting and fluting as part of the same action, causing the genre's gallant swordplay to look fey. Furthermore, Bayes (read: Dryden) is quick to justify all his aggrandized contrivances with reference to a vade mecum, in which his own plays are the gold standard, shoehorning classical precedents to fit the often ungainly shape of his own metric feet.

Though "anti-heroic satire was fairly common," writes Crane, *The Rehearsal* "established dramatic burlesque as a major type until well into the eighteenth century…. having nearly three hundred performances" recorded for over a century after it premiered (x). The lampooning of Dryden's heroic drama took place not just on the stage, however, but off it, as well. John Harold Wilson details a few instances of court wits interrupting the actor's lines in heroic plays to interject burlesque responses, which have been passed down in theatrical lore (*A Preface*, 81-82). Dryden's snarky opposition, led by Villiers, likely also included such figures as Charles Sedley, Samuel Butler, Thomas Sprat, Martin Clifford, and perhaps Lord Rochester, who formerly had acted as Dryden's patron. These and others would have constituted a boisterous and vocal segment of the audience, a skulk of rogues, as it were, in the peanut gallery.

Actors, though, had their own methods of response, more backtalk than talkback. Frequent asides, dropping character, reinterpreting a character from a previous play, and immediately repeating a monologue as an encore when it received a particularly favorable response were some of the many ways an actor could communicate his or her own opinion,

creating a more dialogic theatre between audience and playmakers than most commercial theatre that closes off "the fourth wall" today. Blair Hoxby notes:

> Seating arrangements made it possible for some audience members to sit onstage, while others were placed along each side of the auditorium, opera-house style. Because the entire house remained lit during a performance and because the audience was permitted to move about, playgoers were cast, and were aware of each other, in multiple roles—as observers, performers, and objects of observation. The stage was an open and permeable space, and even the backstage might be penetrated by the curious… and visits to the tiring room to speak with actors and actresses, who might enjoy celebrity status, were not unusual for the well-connected. The practice of having actors and actresses speak the prologues and epilogues of plays out of character must further have encouraged playgoers to see them even when *in* character as just that: persons inhabiting the places of others, rehearsing prior events, acting as surrogates. (253)

With a thrust stage lit by the same lights that filled the playhouse, Restoration theatrical events were less a self-contained illusory world than an on-going dialogue between audiences and theatre practitioners about the nature of performance and role-playing. Such back-and-forth between thespians and audiences—and within the audience itself—created a giddier, more topsy-turvy atmosphere than today's mainstream commercial stage, allowing a supple if precarious exchange of tonal registers within a play. But the mobile, flexible nature of the audience also created a scene in which the playgoers were aware of their own performances as a chattering, well-dressed spectacle. Pepys complains, in fact, of not being able to hear the actors due to

gossip amid the audience, Eric Rothstein notes (43). In this context, sentiment and satire could be interchanged between actors and audience and among audience members, reframing one's attention or attitude to an event on stage; one would not have waited until the end of the play to talk about a scene. High-sounding sentiments might be countermanded by a playgoer's witty scurrilities or, alternatively, an actress's would-be comic turn might meet with sympathetic tears and cheers of heartfelt adoration. The vocal catcalls or clapping from the audience held the power to reposition the generic frame by which one perceived a scene.[9]

One of Dryden's previous plays, *Marriage A-la-Mode* (1673), had already shown propensities to experiment with the disruption of genre, combining, as it did, a versified heroic plot with a comedic subplot in bawdy prose. The coincidence of the more pedestrian pairs of lovers arranging to rendezvous in the same meeting place—and with each other's respective partners—is contrasted with the main narrative, which, in a quite different tone, involves the shifting status among various members of the court. Despite the more serious nature of the plot which is in verse, its characters exchange the throne almost as if they were playing musical chairs. While the pompous French and the fresh puns of the low intrigue emphasize the lovers' actions at humorous cross-purposes, their ultimate serendipity in matrimony nonetheless points out the underlying absurdity of the heroic plot since it, much like the comic plot, depends largely

[9] Harold Love gives the example of the epilogue to Ravenscroft's *The Wrangling Lovers* as an example of this dialogic process:

> The passage has to be imagined as delivered with appropriate obeisances to the pit and the middle gallery as each is in turn the recipient of flattery, and with broad winks in other directions when the formulae of compliment suddenly collapse into insult, as with the 'little spit-frog' for the pit and the last-minute metamorphosis of the generous citizens into a pack of dunces. One must also assume that these effects were designed to draw a positive reaction, laughter from the bulk of the house and retaliatory hisses from the victims. (26)

Love's reconstruction of the actor's delivery of the epilogue from textual and historical evidence crucially depends on a context of vocal jeers and snide comments offered by a divided audience, which could likewise invert the import of a playwright's work. Unfortunately, most of the retaliatory comments and gossip by audience members is lost to the historical record, except a few stray remarks in sources such as Pepys, *The Tatler,* and topical satires.

on a series of coincidences and misunderstandings. The mixture of comic and heroic plots, which eventually conflate, takes advantage of the dialogic Restoration stage: the playwright is keeping one step ahead of his audience by subverting the play's generic terms.

In the heroic plot of *Marriage A-la-Mode*, Hermongenes keeps changing his story about whether Palmyra and Leonides are nobly born, frustrating by turns their desires for sovereign power, on the one hand, and for a romantic union, on the other. In fact, the desire of these lovers remains constant despite the threat of unequal social standing and, alternatively, even the incest taboo. The comic switcheroo of rakes and mistresses in the subplot rubs-off onto the sudden reversals of the main plot, potentially rendering it farcical. This occurs most especially when the low characters collide with the nobility in the culminating scene, and the separate spheres cannot avoid mutual contamination. Additionally, the character of Melantha is often portrayed as an object of ridicule for her arriviste importation of French diction, but, as David Bruce Kramer notes, "Melantha's vocabulary signifies her personal triumph… Dryden's personal triumph lies in his sensitivity to what language will become standard English and incorporating such language, mocking yet stressing its eventual adoption" (113). Although Melantha's rehearsal of French phrases creates comic interludes, depicting her as a social climber, her borrowings become standard practice as she eventually joins the court at play's end, able to dictate fashion to others, just as many of the words Dryden chose to mock in such scenes have since become normalized into English. Oddly, berating and recommending such language is not mutually exclusive. Yet the incongruity extends beyond the level of rhetoric since the comic happenstance of easy lovers aligning mocks the ease with which the crown changes hands. That is, while the light and tripping paramours may be reformed through the romantic stories they tell, to show

sovereign rule changing willy-nilly through such similar dissembling undermines the stability of monarchical power, and possibly the decorum of the heroic genre with it.

While Dryden's detractors, who would burlesque his high-minded heroes, seem to have had a ready-made parodic target in *Marriage A-la-Mode*, we should remember that the complex structural relationship between the two plots could also be seen as going the other way around. The loose sexual mores of the lower-class characters ape the instability at court; only when a true, faithful, and deserving king embodies their aspirations can the loose lovers find security in their marital roles. A renewed order in the sovereign court eliminates domestic strife and uncertainty. Nonetheless, as Anne Righter points out, it is more likely that "the comic low plot simply attacked and destroyed the values of the high. The nobility of the love-and-honor heroes faded away into silliness when confronted by the honesty of the rake" (138). Righter views the "schizophrenic nature of Restoration drama" (139) as due to a schism in the audience itself:

> [C]omedy cut a little too close to the bone to please many of the women and their attendant fops…. The women… seem to have tried long before the general moral reaction at the end of the century to band together and suppress comedies which were particularly outspoken…. Tragedy, on the other hand, flattered exactly those romantic notions and grandiose dreams of self which comedy set out to deflate… (138-139)

While it may be true that Restoration comedy and heroic drama have gendered viewpoints inscribed in their stock characters and plots, the genres also are not as radically antithetical as Righter portrays them. The complex, two-way relationship between heroic drama and Restoration comedy—since both portray misalignments in power, whether public or domestic—

is the subject of *Marriage A-la-Mode*, which demonstrates how the public and domestic spheres are mutually dependent.

Eric Rothenstein states that, "One can both mock and enjoy the same work, even if the work demands being taken seriously; and at least some of the heroic plays… have enough aesthetic merit to withstand attack" (42). Both *The Rehearsal* and *Marriage A-la-Mode* demonstrate the dialogic nature of the Restoration stage by showing how tonal and generic registers became subject to reshaping, not only by audiences' reactions and the actors' performances, but by the playwrights themselves responding to the mercurial contexts in which their plays were interpreted. While theatrical legend has it that Villiers took Dryden to the initial performance of *The Rehearsal* to watch him squirm in his seat, David Crane reminds us that "Dryden… was a shareholder in the King's Company and would have profited financially as much by the success of Buckingham's play as his own" (xiii). At least, we recognize with Robert Hume that "we have ample testimony that the same audiences supported both *The Conquest of Granada* and *The Rehearsal*" (*Rakish Stage*, 48). Indeed, this should not be surprising since any appreciation of *The Rehearsal* requires a familiarity with the models that it lampoons.

Marriage A-la-Mode combines two popular genres, and there is nothing very remarkable in that. As Robert Hume notes, "throughout the period both companies cheerfully stole, imitated, parodied, and combined elements of recent successes. This sort of interaction is half the history of the theatre in this period" (*The Development of English Drama*, 23). Yet, surprisingly, the juxtaposition in *Marriage A-la-Mode* begins to realign the import of the forms it appropriates. Crane sees the Frenchified social-climber, Melantha, of *Marriage A-la-Mode* aligned with Dryden's own linguistic exuberance and social position as an apologist for—though excluded from—the court (xv). Not only does this complicate the assumption that males identify more

with the plight of other males rather than females in theatrical representations, but it also demonstrates the nascent self-parodic valence within the discourse of heroic drama. *Marriage A-la-Mode* depicts the tension between the comedic social-climbing and the heroic tragic falls in the schematic structure of its double plot structure. Thus, both plays also demonstrate the ways that the seemingly juxtaposed genres of heroic and comic drama imbricated many of the same underlying cultural assumptions about social roles.

In this context, we can appreciate the dialogic turns in genre that take place throughout *Aureng-Zebe*. In an astute comparison, J. Peter Verdurmen writes that, "when we compare *Aureng-Zebe* with *The Country Wife*, plays written and produced in the same year, for the same theatre and acting company, resemblances crowd upon us" (330). He argues that the two plays, though they differ in tone, share the same general skeleton of comedic pattern: blocking forces of the aging figurehead of the established society prevent a marriage and the consequent emergence of a new social order, with "*Aureng-Zebe*, perhaps surprisingly, emerg[ing] as the purer 'comedy'" (332). The structure of *Aureng-Zebe* relies on a sentimental love-plot far more than most other heroic dramas since the titular hero is, throughout the play, ready to renounce any claim to power or glory to gain his love interest, Indamora. In addition, Aureng-Zebe disobeys the Emperor, causing the central conflict between a son's duty to his father and his passion for his mistress. The ending, in which the Emperor both consents to the marriage and confers power on Aureng-Zebe, resolves the dramatic problem of the play that, as Verdurmen points out following Northrop Frye, resembles the dilemma brought about by a *senex iratus*, or irritable old man, of Attic New Comedy. The tension between love and duty, rather than power and honor, are at the crux of *Aureng-Zebe*, so that its many plot turns and power shifts depend as much on

the quelling or quickening desires between various characters as they do on the exchange of sovereign rule. In this way, the play follows plot conventions familiar to Restoration comedies.

II. Masculinity in Crisis

Heroic drama already represented a crisis of masculinity, the male heroes failing to attain love or honor until circumstances, often by chance rather than force of will, resolved to provide them with both. Likewise, the era's comedy depicts a corresponding problem of the male characters reconciling motivations of lust with their duties of fidelity, as the happy marriage of a reformed rake at the play's end often seems as doubtful as heroic drama's fortuitous circumvention of tragedy. Vanbrugh's *The Relapse,* for example, takes the libertine, Loveless, who is supposedly reformed at the culmination of Cibber's *Love's Last Shift* and subjects him to new temptations that prove his chastity short-lived. The facile reconciliation at the conclusion of heroic and comic drama of the Restoration could be subjected to satire. Both genres systematically refer to the disruption of gender norms, as well as an acknowledged divide between reality and social expectations in amorous—and, at times, political—relationships.

Moreover, the audience's response was often portrayed, and was perhaps elicited, in gendered terms. Dryden's "Dedicatory Epistle" to *Aureng-Zebe* mentions that "in all courts there are too many who make it their business to ruin wit" (3), perhaps alluding to the old boys club of the court wits who had attacked his previous plays. Dryden goes on to make the curious statement that dullness and plagiarism make up the "character of a courtier without wit, and therefore that which is satire to other men must be a panegyric to your Lordship, who are a master of it" (4). Dryden here portrays dullness as counterfeiting or stealing wit, but the perspectival relationship between true and false wit has the ability to radically invert the

constitutive terms in which something is perceived, from the genre of satire to panegyric. Hence, Dryden, while aligning his own productions with his patron's supposed mastery of wit, nevertheless recognizes the easy maneuvers by which the lofty could become laughable for sections of his audience. "Restoration tragedy," Anne Righter remarks, "continued to embody a feminine as opposed to a masculine point of view" (138-139) since the heroes indulged in exalted paeans to Platonic love, constancy, and loyalty. Though heroic drama represented bellicose victors conflicted by love and honor, they feminized their audiences by appealing to such idealized virtues, which women more than men were expected to uphold.

Despite this gendered preference, Dryden is at pains later in the epistle to defend his play, "which," he admits, "was not pleasing to some of the fair ladies" (10). Some women, we can infer from Dryden's comments, did not enjoy the representation of Melesinda and Indamora: the former seemed a "loving fool" who would die for her unfaithful husband whereas the latter seemed too equivocal in her virtue, "mixed with the frailties and imperfections of human life" (11). Innocence and fidelity are nowhere ideally portrayed, and therefore the women may not have a sentimental ingénue on whom they could cathect. Rather, women in the audience may have felt that, as in much Restoration comedy, the female types portrayed in the drama were objects of satire rather than sympathy. Yet, ironically, feminine and masculine ideals in *Aureng-Zebe* can be found in characters of the opposite gender, both reaffirming and challenging archetypes.

Nandini Bhattacharya identifies the play's design as a form of "behavior-policing" that both castigates "the threat of free female behavior, especially sexual behavior" (162) while "identifying the ostensible hero of the play, Aureng-Zebe, with the 'virtuous' women in the play, thereby 'emasculating' him (168). Though Bhattacharya argues that the play promotes a

misogynist ideology, using her reading, the eponymous hero of the play could be viewed ironically as standing in for the paragon of *feminine* virtue. After all, Aureng-Zebe's triumph results from his passive obedience to his father. The fickle, weak-willed Emperor exhibits feminine traits to be condemned since they have led to political instability, whereas Nourhamal is vilified for her domineering power-grab and lusty rapaciousness, which is too "masculine." Then again, Morat's maniacal swashbuckling also fails for being overly masculine while Melisinda's dutiful self-abnegation is depicted as an extreme of female virtue carried too far. Indamora, however, triumphs as she exemplifies the masculine role of controlling others through the powers of her rhetoric and self-control, despite occupying a position of an enslaved concubine. The gender—as well as the generic—norms in *Aureng-Zebe* can therefore lapse or overlap in complicated, ambivalent arrangements.

For a case in point, the slippery exchange of metaphors between love and war is used throughout the play, but whereas classical authors such as Ovid are presumed to have employed such terms with a comic intent, here they are oftentimes used rather to interrupt or undermine an expectation of continuous seriousness in the heroic drama. The doubling of such tropes for fighting and fawning can be comic, but in this context their potential comedy also serves to deflate the idealization of the bellicose or romantic rhetoric; characters' motives of imperial conquest become almost interchangeable with those of erotic conquest. Hence, even in the most magnanimous speeches, the characters subtly echo the rakes and molls that populated the Restoration's comedic stage. If the verse—through its two-fold discourse that creates generic ambivalence—fails to meet the high ideals that its stately cadences suggest, the characters are also depicted as slipping and falling, tricked out and caught down the traps such a polyvalent discourse has laid.

Morat demonstrates the unwieldiness of these imperialistic-cum-sexual metaphors, for example, when he proclaims:

> To me the cries of fighting fields are charms;
> Keen be my sable, and of proof my arms.
> I ask no other blessing of my stars,
> No other prize but fame, nor mistress but the wars.
> I scarce am pleased I tamely mount the throne.
> Would Aureng-Zebe had all their souls in one;
> With all my elder brothers I would fight,
> And so from partial nature force my right. (59)

If war is his mistress, then "forcing [his] right," by killing all his older brothers who are entitled to the throne before him, becomes synonymous with rape. Morat declares he prefers fighting (and raping) to lawfully taking power, or—carrying the logic of the language through—"tamely mounting" a wife. By means of such indeterminate metaphors, the figure of the libertine is transposed onto the war-monger whose lust for power has few bounds. Morat, however, portrays the Emperor's sacrificing the kingdom to him as equally foolish, saying, "He buys his mistress dearly with his throne" (68). By dismissing the duties of his sovereignty to satisfy his carnal desires, the aged Emperor also comes in for critique due to his rakish profligacy with the equivalent of a whore, the slave Indamora. While Morat eroticizes fighting, the Emperor's mistress is literally a prize obtained in the spoils of battle: Indamora has been purchased with soldiers' lives since she is a captured prisoner-of-war. Indeed, the two extremes of this dilemma

collapse. Morat later changes his tune, wooing Indamora by saying, "For such an empire only kings should fight" (71). Morat's bloody-minded power-grab seems as ridiculous as the Emperor's renouncing everything for some hot-blooded exploit. The dynamics of gender in *Aureng-Zebe* question and invert the conventional representations of masculinity in heroic drama, which itself often portrays an already conflicted view of male gender roles.

III. Shifts in Registers of Rhetoric and in Power Relations

Similarly, if *Aureng-Zebe*'s structure superimposes the pattern of Restoration comedy onto heroic drama, its language, too, plays off competing typological levels. While the diction itself is not overly elaborate or obscure, the play's incessant metrical regularity, rhyming couplets (which are, more usually than not, end stopped), syntactically parallel structure, and stock of rhetorical flourishes such as frequent inversions, self-conscious alliteration, epigrammatic points, and stichomythia nonetheless create a lofty tone. The ideal toward which Dryden's language aims is not Milton's serpentine twisting of English into Latinate phrasing, but rather a more balanced if unyielding correctness. Dryden's impulse to portray paragons speaking in a heroic style thereby achieves a high middle register that is neither sublime nor colloquial, but rather elevated without being inflated, avoiding excess almost to a fault. Against this impeccable polish of language, however, the play insinuates a series of puns, bawdy, and innuendo that corrupts its highly wrought decorum. Robert S. Newman, deeming it a "tragedy of wit" (458), recognizes the play's "ironic plot structures, mixture of modes, and contrasts, shifts, qualifications, and progressions of tone" (439) since the "exaggerated despair turns to exaggerated hope," (454) which "flouts… epic gravity" (455) and even results in a "sense of

farce" (453). The very dignified heights to which the rhetoric frequently climbs afford a launching pad for its slippery pratfalls.

Aureng-Zebe dramatizes the dialectic at work within the dramatic conflicts it portrays, between high and low, sovereign and slave, heroic and bawdy levels of discourse, wherein linguistic slippages can suddenly invert such dichotomies as virtue and crime, love and hate, loyalty and rebellion, or innocence and artifice. The play is at once the apotheosis of Dryden's (sometimes peculiar) neoclassical notions of theatre—obeying the unities and advancing the decorum of speaking in rhyme—while undercutting its baroque, high-flown pomp with a wink to its audience that acknowledges the play as simultaneously a self-parodic, almost campy farce. Language alone grounds the structure of a sovereign's power and a lover's affections—so that when language proves unreliable, the plot's increasingly convoluted twists and convulsive turns cause the characters' relationships to repeatedly convert into their opposites until rescued by a chance intervention. Because remaining outwardly loyal to both his father and mistress "automatically prevents [Aureng-Zebe] from doing anything on his own behalf," writes David W. Tarbet, the dramatic conflicts become less about action than rhetoric, relying almost exclusively on pleas and passionate exhortations. The play thus demonstrates the tenuous nature of achieving legitimacy. The linguistic, as well as performative, ambivalence threatens to undermine legitimacy from within, whether in matters of sexuality, sovereignty, or genre.

Such turns are consistent throughout the play, though they accelerate toward the climax in the fifth act. While the first act focuses on high-flown sentiments and a state in disarray, the second act switches to presenting the more sensational lowdown of domestic turmoil. Indamora uses her charms to cozen Arimant, her guard, to do her bidding. There is a comic reversal acknowledged in this exchange as Arimant declares, "E'en to myself ridiculous I grow" (37).

The Emperor, who overhears part of their repartee, enters to vex Indamora with his solicitations, to which she delivers the put-down, "You're old enough—it may be, sir, too old" (40). Such drollery is followed by the hot-tempered Nourmahal berating the Emperor, offering the stock slapstick situation of the henpecked husband. Unlike Shakespearean tragedy, which is often punctuated with quick comic interludes, the bawdy here is sustained and, in fact, leaches out to create a more thoroughgoing mixed register, where heroic downfalls may easily slip into pratfalls and where extremities of virtue can be made to look vicious or vice versa.

The subtext of this waggish humor nonetheless often upends conventional sexual politics. When the Emperor tells Indamora, "And therefore 'tis your golden fruit you guard, / With so much care to make possession hard," she answers back, "Was't not enough you took my crown away, / But cruelly you must my love betray" (40). Indamora's "crown" is an ambiguous metaphor, which could refer to her maidenhead, to Aureng-Zebe (her lover), or to her authority as a queen. Indamora both asserts her position as the real monarch in charge and laments her loss of royalty or virginity. Similarly, the Emperor later says to Nourmahal, "Man is by nature formed your sex's head, / And is himself the canon of his bed" (46). In this case, the Emperor's declaration of sovereignty over his wife is compromised by the pun on "canon," which sounds like "cannon," converting the line into an inflated phallic joke; a contrary impulse in this line, though, calls man "your sex's head," which insinuates that men are delicate maidenheads rather than the big gun in charge of their domain. The Emperor, while claiming he is the ruler, demonstrates in doing so that he fails to measure up. Thus, the Emperor's pronouncements of holding sexual power are contradicted by his lack of control over the very language he uses to make those claims.

Yet, by the end of the second act, we return to Aureng-Zebe's dilemma, his divided loyalties between his duties as a son and lover. The mood is divided, too, a strange alloy that recognizes the tragic fate of these contending nobles while also spoofing their fatuous grudges. Such internal struggles cause Aureng-Zebe to utter to the Emperor, "Pardon your blood that boils in my veins" (50). The supplication is backhanded in that it asks the Emperor to forgive Aureng-Zebe's inherited irascibility, tacitly blaming the Emperor for Aureng-Zebe's heated—if not hotheaded—rivalry for Indamora. When Aureng-Zebe later proclaims, "I'll not betray the glory of my name" (52), the same circular logic can be applied: Aureng-Zebe's name is, on one level, the same as the Emperor's, and by obeying the Emperor who is betraying his own interest by handing the empire over to Aureng-Zebe's devious younger brother, Morat, Aureng-Zebe's fidelity to his king is simultaneously sedition to the state; his obedience to his father is also an abandonment of his lover to a rival. The circularity of Aureng-Zebe's dilemma emphasizes not only his pusillanimous nature—that is, his willingness to maunder rather than act decisively—but increasingly takes on an aspect of mock-worthy circular chop-logic, as well. Nonetheless, his predicament represents contending loyalties that problematize masculine values.

If the first act begins on a serious note of heroic drama and the second act resonates with broader slapstick and satiric bawdy, then the next two acts deviate almost violently between these tones. By the fifth act, however, the vacillation between linguistic registers is so thoroughgoing that their virtual superimposition issues in dialog that may be continually reinterpreted in new contexts. Irvin Ehrenpreis remarks that when Nourmahal insinuates her desire for her stepson, Aureng-Zebe, "the association of love and death grows more and more titillating… As he ignores his step-mother's heavy language, she must come closer and closer to declaring her incestuous lust" (30). The scene rewrites Hippolytus's relationship to Phaedra with

an almost bawdy, comic subtext. Likewise, when Morat falls in a death agony in Act V, imploring Indamora as he clutches her gown, the action of the scene threatens to grow turgid and histrionic. Here the register of the language becomes ambivalent as Morat declaims:

> I can no more, yet ev'n in death I find
> My fainting body biased by my mind:
> I fall toward you; still my contending soul
> Points to your breast, and trembles to its pole. (106)

Potentially, the tragedy of Morat's great death is replaced by a comic "little death." The soul, as it points upward toward Indamora's breast, becomes physicalized by the logic of the rhyme employed as a trembling phallic pole. Though "pole," of course, could also refer to a fixed point or terminus—and, in poetic diction, even to the sky or heaven—the context of contrasting body and mind within the previous line, along with the explicit reference to breast in the same line as pole, implies that the bawdier sense of that word is foregrounded.

The lines are situated near the middle of Act V in which the seemingly tragic action of the play accelerates to a farcical pace. Nourmahal has just offered a dagger to her rival Indamora, and challenges her to follow through on her idealistic declarations that she would rather die than live without Aureng-Zebe, whom she mistakenly believes has perished. The full extent of Nourmahal's outlandish narcissism is revealed when she says, encountering her captive rival, "Some angel copied, while I slept, each grace, / And molded ev'ry feature from my face… If Heav'n can make throughout another me" (104). The delicious wickedness of the lines may seem redolent of the glamorous yet deluded and aging Queen seeking to poison (and perhaps

simultaneously to seduce) a virginal Snow White. Indeed, Nourmahal does fulfill such a fairy-tale role since she is both an icy queen and Aureng-Zebe's evil step-mother, albeit one with quasi-incestuous desires. Indamora, however, proves far more ambivalent, equivocating about why she cannot muster the courage to take her own life. The sincerity of her word—and whether or not she is, in fact, innocent—is thereby put into question: when the time comes to plunge the dagger in her breast, she just can't cut it. Though she fails to live up to her lofty declarations of love, the dramatic irony of the scene results from the audience's knowledge that Aureng-Zebe is still alive, and therefore Indamora's suicide would have been foolhardy anyway. Rhetoric has the power to betray the events it would represent; even conscious lies may become unwitting truth through dramatic irony.

When Nourmahal realizes Indamora's backsliding ways, she decides to end Indamora herself. At the precise moment Nourmahal attacks Indamora, however, Morat suddenly enters, which escalates the conflict even as it misdirects Nourmahal and Indamora's antagonism by a *deus ex machina*. Upon seeing Indamora, Morat instantly changes from bellicose bluster to the lusty bombast of the inset quote above, as he staggers in his intermittent death agonies, which take over a hundred lines of text to complete. Dryden himself remarked in *An Essay of Dramatick Poesie*, a dialogue in which he took pains to represent opposing sides of dramaturgical arguments, that "I have observed that in all our tragedies, the audience cannot forbear laughing when the actors are to die; 'tis the most comic part of the whole play" (44). In a similar manner, the outsized, unrepentant villainy of Nourmahal can take on a comic tone, as well, as its false grandeur appears egotistical, self-destructive, and contrary to her own interest.

Immediately after Morat dies, Melesinda, Morat's long-suffering wife, exclaims, "Ah, woe, woe, woe! The worst of woes I find! / Live still! Oh live; live e'en to be unkind!" (106-

107). Such an over-the-top lament—the "ah," "oh," and all the "woes" should cue us in—not only ridicules Melesinda's naïve and unrequited fidelity, but helps dislocate the drama from a heroic to a mock-heroic mode. When Morat eventually expires, Melesinda immediately swoons, announcing "Ah, me! He's gone! I die!" (110). In contrast to Indamora, who prevaricates to stave off following through on her promise to embrace death at her lover's demise, Melesinda's swoon symbolizes her instant death by a broken heart. Where Indamora sensibly feints, Melesinda senselessly faints. Indamora controls others through her language while Melesinda has her own meanings contradicted by her utterances.

Yet, if Melesinda's giddy-headed collapse clearly appears like a self-parody of the play's own purported values of heroic stoicism and devoted innocence, showing them up for false and silly, the culmination of Dryden's drama moves beyond farce to engage in a dialectical play of genre in which the tone becomes increasingly difficult to construe into conventional registers. For, although Melesinda's body gets dragged off-stage as if her swooning really were the death of her, she later reenters, as the stage directions note, with "*a procession of priests, slaves following, and last* Melesinda, *in white*" (116). As the dramatic tone of the ending is paradoxical, so, too, her white dress evokes the oxymoronic "funeral marriage" that she craves (107) since white is at once the color of the occident's innocent bride and India's color to connote widows and funerals. Resurrected as it were, she comes back only to martyr herself in flames in the ritual of suttee, calling it "the triumph of my nuptial day" (116). Morat's unkindness only allows her to demonstrate her own unwavering love, she claims (117), and the audience may well be divided on whether to admire her otherworldly fidelity or lampoon her woebegone and misplaced faith. Tragedy and travesty seem precariously close. The superimposition of both perspectives may produce a vertiginous instability: the values of the scene become rapidly dislocated, and the

audience has to reevaluate their initial judgments. The stage directions do not indicate a fire or other special effects. In fact, the Emperor warns, "Let no false show of fame your reason bind" directly before Melesinda's ultimate speech, meta-theatrically hinting that any attempt to render the spectacle of suttee on stage in a "false show" of baroque splendor would cheapen the genuine pathos of Melesinda's death—its apotheosis and catastrophe—into a crass farce. While seeming to help contain the pathos of the scene, the suggestion of anti-theatrical discourse lends further uncertainty to the dramatic moment.

Though she exits before lighting herself on fire, and thus obeys the neoclassical decorum of not representing extreme acts of violence on stage, the last words of this uncanny woman in white before her suicidal self-sacrifice allude back to Morat's rakish bawdy:

> In vain you would bereave me of my lord,
> For I will die. Die is too base a word;
> I'll seek his breast, and kindling by his side,
> Adorned with flames, I'll mount a glorious bride (117).

Again, as in Morat's speech, a fraught lover aims for the other's breast in the agonies of death; again, the baseness of the word "die" could signify its secondary meaning as orgasm. But whereas Morat's "pole" could also be a scepter of sovereign power, Melesinda "mounts" a kind of throne. And while the "mounting" may be colored with a sexual suggestiveness just as Morat's "pole" is, it takes on a very different connotation, one that achieves a possible moment of pathos. In part this is due to Morat's faint-hearted viciousness as opposed to Melesinda's faint-headed though ultimately resolute virtue; in part it may be due to the way the two speeches

are gendered. Morat appears fickle and soft. His pole, far from being firm, actually trembles. Melesinda will "mount a glorious bride": the syntax here could suggest that she is the bride or that, inversely, she takes on the active role of "mounting" and the dead Morat, the passive, feminized role of a bride. Consequently, while an audience member could react to Morat's speech with delight in its double entendres, Melesinda's speech causes an ideological rupture: by following through on her high ideals, she demonstrates the terrifying limit-case of the metaphor of marriage as joining two bodies in one. To ridicule her self-sacrifice, therefore, is also to cast doubt on the existential logic and gravitas of marriage as such. Ultimately, the security of any system of alliance—lovers, spouses, families, clans, or nations—proves only as stable as the language upon which it has been established.

But the quick-change, anfractuous convulsions of the plot do not finish there. Nourmahal enters in the same beat as Melesinda exits to alight herself on the pyre. Nourmahal plays the crazy witch—selfish, scheming, and lusty; she is the polar opposite of the self-abnegating, high-minded, and chaste Melesinda. The dialectic reversals of the play nonetheless collapse this dichotomy, and Nourmahal functions as Melesinda's substitute, symbolically consumed in flames, though these are the flames of desire rather than sacrifice. Nourmahal's lines ironically describe *both* her own self-consuming egoism *and* the self-sacrificial plight of Melesinda:

> I burn! I more than burn; I am all fire!
> …Ha, ha! How my old husband crackles there!
> Keep him down, keep him down, turn him about;
> I know him; he'll but whiz and go straight out.
> Fan me you winds! Why not one breath of air?

I burn 'em all, and yet have flames to spare.
Quench me; pour on whole rivers. 'Tis in vain:
Morat stands there to drive 'em back again.
With these huge bellows in his hands he blows
New fire into my head; my brain-pan glows.
See, see! There's Aureng-Zebe too takes his part;
But he blows all his fire into my heart! (118)

That Nourhamal's "old husband crackles," for example, could refer to the Emperor's haughty laughter, echoing her own, or to the sound of tinder burnt in a pyre. In Melesinda's suttee, she might have to turn over the body of the husband to keep the fire from going out—but Nourhamal's reference to "keep him down, turn him about" seems to describe the action of the play more generally: the various characters seek to keep the king down as the sovereign power is continually turned over from one hand to another.

Nourhamal's speech is not just the antithesis of Melesinda's; it reworks the trope of burning in another musical key, as it were. J. Peter Verdurmen notes that Nourhamal's "progression from desire to desire opens her to ridicule" (337). The diction of "whiz," whether it means to hiss, wheeze, or urinate, seems clearly comic, as does "brain-pan," which savors of deliberate bathos. It is evident that she is raving, driven crazy by her burning desires. She hallucinates that Morat is still there, with bellows nonetheless, though he has died and been carried away from the scene by this point. The heroic grandeur of her exclamation "pour on whole rivers" is given a self-parodic spin when spoken here since Nourhamal's outlandish vanity renders these lines extravagant and grasping. She soon "*sinks down*" under her own exasperation,

according to the stage directions (118), as if her hyperventilating speech fanned her own flames until they consumed her. Though the Emperor declares, "With thy last breath thou hast they crimes confessed," it is not clear whether her sinking down is actually her death, especially since we previously witnessed Melesinda rise from her swoon. If it is her death, her last words are, "Poor helpless I / See all and have my hell before I die," (118) which becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. She expires in the hell-flames of her own delusional self-pity and libidinous fury. In summary, the shifting generic registers and tonal ambivalence of *Aureng-Zebe* forces the audience to reconceive the import of the scenes. It also depicts the precarious nature of power relations, wherein the fate of domestic and national alliances hinges on the delicate re-interpretation of mere words.

IV. The Citational Nature of Language and the Restaging of Framing Devices

The role of rhetoric and interpretation, rather than action, is paramount in *Aureng-Zebe*. The play foregrounds linguistic ambiguities, challenging its readers and audiences to acknowledge not only the multiplicity inherent in its language, but the two-fold if not two-faced shades of character, the dialectic of performance with reality, and the paradoxical nature of power, as well. Dialogue is inherently citational—prefabricated scraps of script iterated in different contexts. As such, its significance is subject to variation as that context gets restaged. Although this may be true of all dialogue, the formal repetition of the same or similar speeches in different scenes in *Aureng-Zebe* emphasizes language's citational nature, especially as major plot points hang upon the quibbles over how that restaging alters the lines' meanings. One of the most pointed examples of this multiplicity is when Aureng-Zebe quotes Indamora's lines back to her in Act V. Indamora says to Morat, as he pleads to her in his death agonies for a sign while

kissing her hand, “Oh stay, or take me with you when you go; / There’s nothing now worth living for below” (119). Aureng-Zebe comes in to witness this scene unbeknownst to the others. About forty lines later, Aureng-Zebe delivers the exact same lines, citationally, to prove that Indamora has been unfaithful. Indamora, nonetheless, defends her statement as not indicating her affection for Morat, but rather expressing her gratitude to him:

> As briefly will I clear my innocence:
> Your altered brother died in my defense.
> Those tears you saw, that tenderness I showed,
> Were just effects of grief and gratitude.
> He died my convert. (113)

To which Aureng-Zebe responds, “And your lover too. / I heard his words and did your actions view” (113). Aureng-Zebe is convinced that he has ocular proof—he witnessed the event, and he can even quote the very words he heard. He feels he knows the truth of the matter, and thus he suspects Indamora of engaging in casuistry, playing word games to disguise her cheating.

There may be some dramatic irony in this situation, however, since Aureng-Zebe entered the scene late and so did not witness the context in which Morat rescues Indamora from Nourmahal, recants his ambition, and asks forgiveness from his wife. Indamora’s claims of her intent seem more substantial when placed in this larger context. More likely, however, the lines indicate Indamora’s less than faultless nature and her failure to live up to the heroic ideal of a lover that dies from her grief for a dead beloved—or at least, is faithful even after death. Thus, the ambivalence of these lines complicates the audience’s notion of the moral undergirding on

which the play is based, and the nature of the two main characters. Robert S. Newman views this contrast between absolute values and more pragmatic ones, especially as they are indicated in Aureng-Zebe and Indamora's relationship, as exhibiting "a self-conscious awareness that the conventions of heroism no longer quite match the behavior of men" (447), shifting the tone closer to a heroic parody. While Aureng-Zebe's high-mindedness is shown as absurd, the supposedly chaste Indamora flirts with coquettish libertinage even as she attempts to cover her tracks with religious-sounding cant.

Nonetheless, there is a meta-theatrical irony lurking in Aureng-Zebe's quotation of Indamora's lines, as well, which was probably not lost on its contemporaneous audience. After all, *The Rehearsal* appropriated lines from Dryden's previous heroic dramas to create a successful pastiche by taking those quotes out of context for purposes of parodying them. *Aureng-Zebe*, especially when we consider it as Dryden's riposte to *The Rehearsal*, does not attempt a monolithic seriousness, as it is possible his earlier heroic dramas did, but clearly acknowledges the mixture of tones and ambiguities that proliferate in the play. *Aureng-Zebe* exacerbates such mixed tones and ambiguities, in fact. By having Aureng-Zbe re-cite Indamora's lines, then, Dryden co-opts Villiers's technique of citing lines to distort and parody their meanings, uses it within his own play, and thereby demonstrates his self-consciousness about the shifting registers and significance of the language he uses in addition to the generic frames that he deploys. The slipperiness of these appropriations is of fundamental dramatic import throughout *Aureng-Zebe*, rather than simply being played for laughs at choice moments. In this scene where he accuses Indamora, Aureng-Zebe takes the role of the somewhat naïve literalist who insist on the original psychological intentionality of words while Indamora plays the sophistical deconstructionist who seemingly bends and blends any citational scrap to serve her

purposes. Furthermore, Aureng-Zebe stands-in for the naïve version of Dryden himself who had his lines skewered by the designs of Villiers; yet, it seems, Dryden tries to show that he has always been more like Indamora in this conflict, alive to the various nuances at work in his plays (or at play in his work), even if this has not been consistently recognized by his belittling or literal-minded audiences.

Another signal example of re-citation occurs at the inception of the third act when Arimant engages Indamora in a dialogue about writing itself. Indamora tells Arimant that he can "judge how ill I write," handing him a letter she has been composing (54). When Arimant reads the line, "Less for your own than for your sorrow sad—," he interjects, "Another line like this would make me mad!—" (54). Arimant's comment could be taken to refer to the fact that the letter he is reading upsets him since it declare Indamora's love for Aureng-Zebe instead of for himself. However, a secondary (and yet perhaps more obvious) meaning is that "sorrow sad" is sadly pleonastic. The line is padded out and the end rhyme forced, thus calling attention to the poor or haphazard quality of the versification.

Arimant reciting the lines of Indamora is equivalent to an actor reading a script: the moment takes on a meta-theatrical design, with his commentary pointing out the already citational nature of the actor's speech. Again, the situation of repeating lines to castigate them perhaps alludes to *The Rehearsal*. Heroic drama's endless and intricate heroic couplets chiming line after line could very well drive many audience members mad. It is as if Dryden were cuing the audience that not only is he aware of the shifting registers of his play, but he is deliberately juxtaposing the high and low, using verse to emphasize both the foolishness *and* the nobility of the characters, and willing to self-consciously court bathos in the process. In other words, Dryden is pointing out his own "good" bad taste, evincing awareness of the faults to which the

form makes authors prone. At the same time, by including particularly egregious verse, he inoculates his own poetry from seeming as obnoxious by contrast.

The structure of *Aureng-Zebe* as a whole gives evidence of its self-consciousness that reality—contaminated as it is by language—can be quickly changed when given a new context or description. The play is itself framed by a reflection on framing: the first act begins with the Omrahs of various factions arguing amongst themselves about the recent upheaval of the kingdom. One says, "Brand not their actions with so foul a name," in response to another's calling the sons who have taken up arms against their father, the ailing Emperor, "[r]ebels and parricides" (18). Whether the sons are valiantly trying to protect a divided kingdom or are criminally attempting to gain power is a matter that depends as much on how their actions are characterized as on what they actually do. Most of the action in the play, at any rate, remains off-stage while the real conflict centers on the descriptions—the framing—given to events, with an emphasis not on what is said so much as how it is performed or characterized. A little later, Morat's ambassador claims that he disobeyed the Emperor's mandate because, "He thought the mandate forged, your death concealed, / And but delayed till truth should be revealed" (22). Again, words can be forged and are not to be trusted, though that very lack of trust can also be twisted into an opportunistic gambit, as the ambassador seems to do here.

Near the end of the first act, Aureng-Zebe, who hitherto has been an exemplary pattern of a loyal son, turns into a rebel on the verge of fighting the Emperor's guard to free his beloved, Indamora, a queen whom he has captured in the late wars. His father, the Emperor, has solicited Indamora's favors. Aureng-Zebe pretends to deny he knows to whom Indamora is referring so that he does not become tempted to disobedience: "Yes, for I'll not believe my father meant. / Speak quickly, and my impious thoughts prevent," (32). Indamora replies, "You've said; I wish

I could some other name" (32). Aureng-Zebe thus seeks to negate the implications of language while using it to cover up his guilt-riddled thoughts. Yet, even in Indamora's response, there lurks the suggestion that perhaps some "other name" could rectify the situation—that some technicality of nomenclature might expiate his guilt, not that some other person has committed the actions of which she speaks. By the final monologue of the act, Aureng-Zebe exclaims, "My virtue was surprised into a crime" (33), paradoxically remarking on how his virtuous love for Indamora has nearly caused him to disobey his father, the tyrannical sovereign. The line, though, expresses a balanced conceit that is nevertheless blatantly incongruous; it signals that the world of the play has turned topsy-turvy and absurd not despite but *because* of its overwrought propriety, in both poetic tone and heroic tenor. Just as sovereign authority is up for grabs within the play, the affective significance of the dialogue plays fast and loose, being neither wholly sober nor nonsensical. It is, rather, volatile, disputable, and in abeyance. The significance of the dialogue waits to be grounded by some context, yet resists any context that is absolute, preferring to refer instead to on-going frames of reference that remain in dispute: the cruces by which authority is perpetually disputed result in a crisis wherein no one is assured of having supremacy.

V. Plot Reversals, Farce, and the Ambiguity of Characters

The kaleidoscopic twists given to the language re-quoted or echoed in the play frequently aligns with reversals in the plot. In a similar way, the turns in the plot accelerate as the play progresses so that an incident, which initially may appear tragic, is often followed by a similar episode that feels melodramatic and then a later one still that makes a comparable scene reach a farcical velocity. Each mode has its characteristic speed. Tragic turns proceed from a relatively slow unfolding aligned with the classic decorum of the genre, as a lifetime's fate is temporally

revealed in the condensed metonymic unity of a single day; melodramatic turns by contrast can be likened to variations in musical key and follow from the urgency of characters' emotional responses; farcical turns, however, take place with all the swiftness of reasoning, which perhaps proceeds even more quickly when unsound—or when logic operates with a life of its own independent of the characters' thoughts.

By accumulating different plot reversals that pace the drama toward an ever more rapid finale, the characters themselves shift from ennobled heroes to vulnerable human beings to stock comedic characters and eventually may even begin to seem little better than puppets. As the dial is cranked faster, the agency behind the characters' actions undergoes a metaphysical re-conception: events once thought to be controlled by fate, or will, or convention, look more under the direction of a mechanistic script, a more earthbound fatalism. The slight distortion of re-playing a scene in fast-forward, as it were, recasts it in a different light, producing the hasty waddle of the Keystone Kops or high-pitched chipmunk voices. In *Aureng-Zebe* this speed also renders the characters fundamentally ambiguous, as both their motives and their moral integrity can seem to pivot at any moment. As the plot veers, idealism can change places with self-interest, and the audience is challenged to reconsider what distinguishes the two, and which one should be valued more.

Derek Hughes writes that Aureng-Zebe's seeming "triumph" at the play's end is far more "equivocal and precarious" than often suspected:

> [Aureng-Zebe] and Indamora have been reconciled—have, indeed, survived—not because of his inflexible idealism but in spite of it. Nor does the ending promise a future of flawless bliss. Aureng-Zebe's relationship with Indamora has been one of bickering

> suspicion, of quarrel, reconciliation, and further quarrel, and the ending gives no assurance that the last reconciliation will be any more stable than its predecessors…. Aureng-Zebe's career, like that of Nourmahal and her kind, has been one of self-deception and unstable passion. But, whereas the passions that animate Nourmahal burn themselves into extinction, those of Aureng-Zebe reach only an equivocal and precarious quiescence. (124)

Hughes argues that Dryden's play systematically undoes the idealistic expectations set up by the heroic genre, presenting Indamora as the practical, experienced, and not inflexibly virtuous manager-of-affairs while Aureng-Zebe is portrayed as a self-involved, headstrong absolutist who is never in control of the situation.[10] Whereas Aureng-Zebe inclines to petulant recrimination, Indamora "handles her admirers with a worldly and witty aplomb" (125). Given this disparity between heroic conventions and the practical reality presented in the play, Hughes states that Dryden's portrayal of "unheroic love" is "designedly comic" at times (125). In fact, Hughes declares that Aureng-Zebe's "high minded sententiousness" has a "hollow-ring" so that he is no longer the principled idealist of tragedy but the obstinate precisian of comedy (135-136).

Hughes, however, probably goes too far when he says that "there is nothing cynical or mocking in Dryden's treatment of [Indamora]" (126). In his insistence on defining Aureng-Zebe as an unyielding, obtuse tyrant, Hughes fails to appreciate the seductive prevarications of

[10] Though Indamora is an ambivalent figure, so, too, is Aureng-Zebe. Despite the views of critics such as Hughes who represent Aureng-Zebe as immature and impossibly idealistic, J. Douglas Canfield writes that "critics who find Aureng-Zebe unbelievable do not understand the genre" (*Heroes*, 24). Though Canfield is correct in pointing out the nature of heroic dramas to represent high-minded if somewhat bombastic protagonists, there is another sense in which the play, as I have been arguing, is challenging the very genre of which it partakes. Aureng-Zebe is most correct, much like the play that bears his name, in terms of the conventions of heroic drama—but Dryden is also questioning those conventions, destabilizing if not overturning the heroic drama by putting it in dialogue with farce or comedy. He presents complex characters who afford different affective responses from the audience than the stock responses engendered by more prototypical heroic models.

Indamora as a sign of her own ambivalence: she is not just the worldly wife or the benign ruler behind-the-scenes, but also a forked-tongue charmer whose skill at doublespeak allows her to manipulate the men around her. Far from promulgating an "ideology of masculine control over, and domination of, women," as Shawn Lisa Maurer writes (156), *Aureng-Zebe* consistently deflates masculine hubris. None of the would-be male rulers is fit for the throne: the Emperor is impotent; Morat is hell-bent on his own glory, but for all his braggadocio he quivers like pudding; and Aureng-Zebe is portrayed as foolishly idealistic and ineffectual. From this morass, Indamora—whose very "name (India + amor) suggests a symbolism of combined land and love," as William Frost notes (28)—emerges as the power-broker of the state's broken power. She placates the Emperor, converts Morat, and staves off Aureng-Zebe's rasher impulses until the various crises can be averted. A captured queen, Indamora is a literal slave who dialectically becomes the play's sovereign master.

Everyone who has designs on the throne (Morat, Arimant, the Emperor, Aureng-Zebe, and even Nourmahal) professes a desire for Indamora, as she symbolically embodies the power of the state. Indamora, though, is neither the completely pious wife nor the power-mad virago; she partakes of a middle course between Melesinda and Nourmahal. Yet, it is a middle course in which her professions of piety and innocence can make her sometimes appear a suave, coquettish schemer who is guilty of hypocrisy.

Laura Brown succinctly captures the lose-lose situation in which the major figures in Dryden's heroic plays find themselves: "in the peculiar formal paradox that characterizes this drama, the choice of honor can result in the loss of honor, and the choice of love in the loss of love" ("Dryden," 70-71). Morat hopes to gain honor by winning the crown, but would do so through dishonorable fratricide; the Emperor gives up his state for Indamora only to have her

renounce him. Aureng-Zebe, though, is nearly gored on both horns of this dilemma: his loyalty to his father results in the Emperor casting him aside while his too-trusting devotion to Indamora perhaps cost him her undivided fidelity since she (somewhat ambiguously) shows affection for Morat. These *aporia* in *Aureng-Zebe* are worked up to such a pitch that they become knowingly absurd. The play's structure turns upon frustrating its own inevitably tragic trajectory until the constant reversals prove farcical. Aureng-Zebe declares to Nourmahal, for instance, that he is "cursed by your love and blasted by your praise" (79), a sentiment that could also apply to Aureng-Zebe's relationship to his father or his lover. This conundrum quickly switches to a comic register when Nourmahal begs Aureng-Zebe to kill her with a dagger she offers him if he cannot love her. Her operatic demand is refused, and Aureng-Zebe confesses he will neither love her nor kill her. She stamps her foot, in a sudden plunge from grandiose tragedy to adolescent temper-tantrum. [11]

Even the closing couplet of the play, after the Emperor bestows the crown, along with Indamora, upon Aureng-Zebe, partakes of an ambivalence of tone and meaning. The Emperor tells him, "Take you the reins, while I from cares remove, / And sleep within the chariot which I drove" (118). At first glance, the lines could be viewed as a triumphal closure—the state stabilized and justice redeemed. The father, at last, is passing on the sovereignty to his faithful son, who can finally relax after all the uncertainty and civil unrest. Though the Emperor comes to his senses enough to retire, Aureng-Zebe never achieves a similar recognition about his own jealousies or conflicting loyalties, and so the play has no proper anagnorisis. There are,

[11] Part of the "operatic" nature of Dryden's play may be due to the fact that, as John Harold Wilson points out, "Whining or canting… seems to have been the hallmark of the romantic or heroic lover" ("Rant, Cant, and Tone" 593). The acting style of rants and toning—close to recitative—which was common in heroic drama was parodied in many Restoration comedies, such as *The Triumphant Widow*, *The Empress of Morocco*, and *The Comical Revenge*. Hence, in *Aureng-Zebe*, Dryden appears to be taking advantage of the thin line between earnest and parodic acting styles.

moreover, countervailing tendencies at work—"sleep," especially, seems an ironic and troubling word. After all, it is the Emperor, not Aureng-Zebe, who will finally get to rest. Does the last line modify Aureng-Zebe or the Emperor? The phrase "while I from cares remove" could be merely parenthetical, bracketed by commas. Given the degree of syntactic inversions and elaborate sentence constructions in the play, knowing who is the subject of the action—in both grammatical and political turnings, which frequently coalesce in this play—becomes difficult to discern or amenable to different interpretations. Thus, sleep could be used with its sexual connotation since the Emperor has just handed over his mistress, Indamora, as if she, too, were an inheritance, perhaps objectified as the "chariot."

Though it may seem that men are trading a woman as property, just a few lines above the Emperor has said, "Receive the mistress you so long have served," indicating that Indamora has had—and perhaps will continue to claim—the upper hand, even as she is being handed over. Indamora, rather than Aureng-Zebe, has been most responsible for gaining the power of the state from the Emperor, and virtually the whole play has demonstrated how she exercises her control through covert means. Thus, a second sense of "sleeping at the wheel" arises in this last couplet: Aureng-Zebe is given the reins to a chariot by his father much like Phoebus was given the reins of the sun-chariot by Helios. Michael W. Alssid points out that the "sun image pervades the dialogue" in the play, but somehow fails to catch the allusion in these concluding lines, seeing the ending as "celebrating the accession of the young husbandman-emperor" (468). Not only does the allusion hint that unsteady hands may be taking over, but it also suggests that the Emperor himself drove the state while under a somnambulistic spell. The myth harkens back to the images of turning and burning and the fiery destruction that have been increasingly at play as the drama nears its finale. In this sense, the last lines are far from triumphal, heralding a potential

disastrous fall of the whole political structure and the possible resumption of civil war. Sleep, then, may have yet another meaning as death since it comes after the demise of several characters, forecasting more deaths to come after the play concludes. Such ambiguity is consonant with Aureng-Zebe's multifaceted character, which can be viewed as either steadfast, principled, and heroic in the face of contradictory loyalties and loves or as contaminated by overweening hubris, stubborn (yet fickle) self-righteousness, and utter blindness to the subtler machinations of realpolitik.

Hairpin plot turns and ambiguous characters are symptomatic of the play as it strains at the limitations of the heroic drama it nonetheless exemplifies. The impetus of *Aureng-Zebe* to parody the very heroic conventions it fulfills may reflect, and result from, a self-division within its contemporaneous audience. In short, the court wits and their acolytes were more ready than ever to laugh down the genre's foolish rhymes and fulsome rhetoric while the feminized portion of the playgoers increasingly valued more domestic and sentimental characters to the far-flung colonial world-conquerors declaiming in verse. The traditional masculine virtues that the heroic drama was supposed to celebrate had caused it to start looking ridiculous, the drama dissolving into so much long-winded bluster.

Instead, *Aureng-Zebe* transposes traditionally imperial, masculine virtues onto its villains, most emphatically Morat and Nourmahal, at the same time that it renders the central protagonists, Indamora and Aureng-Zebe, seemingly passive, imperfect, and ambiguous. Aureng-Zebe exemplifies the feminine virtue of obedience while Indamora may well be a paragon of political diplomacy and persuasion, through which she clandestinely wins "masculine" power. Furthermore, the play identifies winning the power of the state almost exclusively with wooing the leading lady, which allows the war-mongering to take a back seat to

the love-plot. Arthur C. Kirsch observes that "pity and the capacity for tears have begun to supercede the union of private and public pride as the credentials of heroism, and the focal scenes are those which occasion a display of those sentiments rather than those which demonstrate grandeur and evoke admiration" (42). In its altered gender norms and conflation of generic modes, *Aureng-Zebe* can be viewed in some ways as anticipating the changes that would result in the paradigm shift to later she-tragedies and sentimental drama. Kirsch notes that in this transition, "as sentimentality took over, the grandeur which the heroic couplet required was not there—the rhyme was no longer appropriately ennobling" (47). Nevertheless, *Aureng-Zebe* could fulfill multiple roles for a brief moment in dramatic history, as it paradoxically manipulated the genre of heroic drama into both a self-parodic farce (with similarities to Restoration comedy) and a sentimental, domestic tragedy that anticipated theatrical developments in the coming decades.

Passion Play: Christian Tragedy and The Unreformed Rake in *The Beggar's Opera*

John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* uses a variety of metaleptic devices, in which one form or trope is superimposed upon another to produce ambivalent and ironic meanings. Just as its lyrics displace and comment upon previous popular ballads, the seeming conclusions of the opera itself are superimposed upon its own sequel, *Polly*, which thereby produces skewered significations for the original. Likewise, *The Beggar's Opera* overlays different generic conventions (i.e., comedy and tragedy) and character types upon one another: foremost among these, Macheath embodies both an unreformed rake and a Christological hero. The plot of the opera, situated inside the meta-theatrical framing device of the dialogue between the Beggar and the Poet, again offers a self-parodic "double capacity" of contrasting modes. By attending to the

ways that these transpositions operate, we can gain a better understanding of the play as a whole, and, more specifically, of the ending, which has evoked a bewildering variety of critical responses. The covert expectations conjured by the opera's various juxtaposed designs ultimately implicates the audience—and itself—in the commercial ethos that it critiques. Moreover, the different models demonstrate the transformations of gendered archetypes taking place, with residual Christian, still-dominant aristocratic, and emergent mercantile ideals all competing and overlapping in the early eighteenth century. *The Beggar's Opera* reveals how these different paradigms both collude and contradict each other, as cultural representations of masculinity in particular arrived at a moment of redefinition.

I. *Polly* and the Polyvalent Meanings of *The Beggar's Opera*

Given, as Dianne Dugaw notes, that "Gay wrote *The Beggar's Opera* and *Polly* in tandem, both being prepared for production in a single year, 1728," we have reason to suspect the nominally later work is consonant with its so-called original (167). In conceiving them as a pair, then, Gay possibly envisioned the relationship of the sequel to its progenitor text as resembling the displacement and elision of meaning that takes place through other techniques he used, such as the metalepsis of the ballad lyrics and the superimposition of multiple generic forms. Namely, the significance we discover in one can obtain an altered valence when placed against the other. Though each opera may be appreciated independently for the most part, their juxtaposition reveals a series of inversions and ironies one may otherwise overlook. One standard critical view is that the celebration of vice at the conclusion of *The Beggar's Opera* is seemingly rectified to a more conventionally moralistic ending in *Polly.* In its turn, *Polly* redacts *The Beggar's Opera* so that the dark subtexts the characters evade in the first opera are made

more manifest and satirically pointed in the sequel. However, an understanding of how *Polly* is sentimental yet subversive in its elusive closure can consequently shed light on similar undercurrents in the original.

Polly portrays Macheath as the black-faced leader of a group of pirates in the West Indies, where Polly Peachum has come looking for him. Macheath, having spread the rumor of his own death, uses his disguise to keep the women off him, he claims, so that he can be faithful to his wife, Jenny Diver, who, it appears, has tamed his libertine ways. Meanwhile, Polly cross-dresses in order to run away from a master who had bought her as a household servant, intending to debauch her as a *de facto* concubine. She joins the piratical gang, only to aid in a mutiny, bribe her way out of prison, and allow a captured Indian prince to escape. The conclusion suggests that the faithful Polly marries the Indian prince, Cawwawkee, the play's moral avatar who denounces all European cant, while Macheath finally meets the gallows, despite Polly's belated intercession in his favor.

Nevertheless, even in this morally sanitized and socially acceptable conclusion, Gay leaves some wiggle room of ambiguity: Polly never actually marries Cawwawkee since she must endure a proper period of mourning first, and we never witness the end of Macheath. Cawwawkee tells Polly, "If justice has overtaken him, he was unworthy of you" (143), though the only affirmation of the antecedent is when Polly exclaims, "He's dead, he's dead! Their [the natives'] looks confess it" (144). The shrewd reader, however, knows that we have witnessed Macheath elude the clutches of death several times before, escaping prison and then, once recaptured, getting a last minute reprieve in the original opera, as well as resurrecting again despite the previous reports of his death in the sequel. Thus, if the text strongly hints of a world in which villainy is ultimately punished and goodness rewarded, the possibility remains that

Macheath survives. Consequently, Polly may be left eternally longing for the rogue—"an honest girl, to be sure," as Ducat remarks, who "had too much virtue to thrive"—just as she was at the outset. The captain, for his part, may have devised yet another eleventh hour elision of his punishment despite the seemingly moralistic conclusion. Perhaps Gay envisioned a franchise, or at the least a possible trilogy. There is even a slight insinuation, if one reads in the raffish spirit of the original, that Ducat, Polly's licentious former master, might inherit the saucy Jenny Diver as his slave, an arrangement that would appear mutually beneficent given their compatible vices.

Though Polly is clearly a sentimental heroine in her eponymous opera, Gregory Timmons recognizes that "Polly arguably is ruined when she arrives in the West Indies" (116) since she has been abandoned by Macheath and has only been equivocally married. Then again, she persists in *acting* as if she were married, despite good reasons to consider herself a widow (or otherwise), and the plot ironically validates her claims when Macheath turns back up. Thus, Polly's status is constantly in abeyance—not only as a married women, a widow, or an abandoned profligate, but between her roles as house servant, kept prostitute, and even lesbian swashbuckler (when Jenny Diver tries to seduce her). Polly is many things, as her name implies, yet what seems like her naïve delusions about her own propriety may also be a canny means to put a respectable face on her untoward circumstances, a practical ability for euphemism and disguise not unlike her family's practiced cant. Cawwawkee, after all, observes that she must be "corrupt" to bribe her way out of jail (123). Likewise, her ability for misrepresentation is reinforced by her on-going disguise as a stout-hearted buccaneer, which convinces everyone around her. If the opera's conclusion is indeed ambiguous, then Polly's status remains similarly undecided, and she could again end up as a grieving widow, a ruined strumpet, an Indian princess, or a savvy independent woman. Though critics customarily have been befuddled by the

conclusion of *The Beggar's Opera*, they have been too pat in their assessment about the supposedly tidy moral convictions conveyed by the convicts of its sequel.

By discerning the ambivalence of Polly and Macheath as they are represented in *Polly,* we may gain a better appreciation for the many shades each character can take in *The Beggar's Opera*. Gregory Timmons observes that:

> the foregrounding of the sexual threat to Polly in her encounter with Ducat underscores the existence of the same threat in *The Beggar's Opera*, namely, the threat of seduction and betrayal through the lure of the seemingly legitimate offer (marriage in *The Beggar's Opera,* domestic employment in *Polly*). (115)

The danger—or willful complicity—of Polly's romantic engagement to Macheath is happily elided in *The Beggar's Opera*, though *Polly* points out that those who would believe her more than just another of Macheath's conquests may themselves sponsor a naïve projection. In contrast to the view of Polly as a naïf, the use of what we would today term blackface and drag is remarkable for the wholesale transformation in character it brings about. Whereas Macheath's black piratical guise dissipates his artful guile and leaves him exposed as a slave to his lust for women and money, Polly goes from a lovesick waif to a courageous—and cunning—cabin boy. Macheath's make-up paints him in his true colors; yet so, too, does Polly's. We can retroactively acknowledge the other side of Polly, the shrewd capitalist negotiator and bona fide Peachum, through this revelation of her personality. In *The Beggar's Opera,* under this interpretation, she leverages her beauty and virginity to extract a true marriage from her rakish paramour. While critics have been apt to emphasize the innate goodness of the "natural savage" and sentimental

figures in *Polly*, the play turns at least as much on denaturalizing its subjects by portraying their alterations according to the social masks they wear.

The justice achieved—or at least implied—in *Polly* is often regarded as bringing containment to the not-altogether-ironic celebrations of the outlaw portrayed in *The Beggar's Opera*. But by reevaluating that containment, we can also consequently be made aware of the ways that *The Beggar's Opera* both satisfies and violates traditional moral and generic expectations. In a similar context, Erin Mackie states, "operating like the trope of highway robbery in *The Beggar's Opera*, the trope of piracy turns to indict the iniquities domesticated by licensed commerce" (126). The pirate is at once a threat to capitalist and colonialist expansion and a condoned aspect of it. Likewise, *The Beggar's Opera* calls attention to the parallels between legal and extralegal institutional arrangements: one of those institutions is the theatre itself, with its capitalist imperative to please its audience and comport to generic decorum. The secret pleasures that attend upon violating these strictures have been rendered more covert in *Polly*; nonetheless, its ambiguity reciprocally highlights the radical contingency of the closure granted in *The Beggar's Opera*.

II. Generic Ambivalence and Musical Metalepsis

The numerous critical interpretations of *The Beggar's Opera* and its long stage history confirm the multifariousness of its characters and the opera's generic ambivalence. Ricardo Quintana writes:

> *The Beggar's Opera* is so many things all at the same time… It is burlesque of Italian opera. It is ironic pastoral—a "Newgate allegory." It is comedy of manners. It satirizes

> sentimental comedy, heroic tragedy, and the situations of romance. It was also part, as is sometimes forgotten, of the great drive of the Tory satirists… (xix)

This situation has led many critics to define the drama according to one of these types to the exclusion of the others, though the very wit and force of the drama derives in large part from how it plays off its various generic conventions. This critical tendency to set the play in a pre-established mold, as Ian Donaldson notes, is not a recent phenomenon, either:

> Eighteenth-century performances of the play were quite as various as those in modern times. In 1777—to take just one instance—*The Whitehall Evening Post* found occasion to complain with equal tartness of the two productions of *The Beggar's Opera* then running at the two main London theatres; at one house Lucy was being played as high tragedy, at the other she was played as low comedy, and "we scruple not to pronounce them both wrong." (66)

To emphasize any one genre to the exclusion of the other, as *The Whitehall*'s critic rightly points out, eviscerates the drama's complex interplay of competing values, by which it makes its most pointed social commentary. John Brewer gives more context to these productions when he writes that:

> The 1777 Covent Garden performances offered the popular and statuesque singer Mrs. Farrell in the role of Macheath, and a new sententious ending, in which the highwayman is sentenced to heave ballast on the Thames for three years… A rival production at Drury

> Lane dressed Macheath as a fop—a 'finished Macaroni,' as the *Whitehall Evening Post* put it—and also added a moral homily to the final scene. But these changes were dwarfed by the changes made by George Coleman in his 'topsy-turvy' production at the Haymarket in 1781, when the male roles were played by women, and the female by men. Not to be outdone, Covent Garden followed this with performances by an all-woman cast. (446)

Brewer claims that the tendency to burlesque the play acted in concert with bowdlerizing it: both took heat off the play's pointed social commentary, displacing it onto spoofs of gender and/or correcting it with a faultless moral, while at the same time firming up the play's ethical and generic ambiguities. Both tendencies were likewise part of the larger commercial fragmentation of the text, Brewer argues, which exploited its popularity to produce ephemera such as playing cards and lady's fans. Brewer concludes:

> Gay had tried to transcend the commercial culture he wrote about by means of satiric distance and deliberate irony… But… the forces Gay portrayed—the commercial system of fragmenting, copying, and reproducing—snatched *The Beggar's Opera* back… (449)

The Beggar's Opera, while critiquing the commercial ethos, does not necessarily attempt to "transcend" it, however: the work acknowledges, rather, that the underworld does not differ significantly from those with official power. The culture of capitalism is ubiquitous and all-consuming (indeed, it *is* consumption). For all its irony, then, the opera ultimately conflates levels instead of trying to create distancing effects: commercial motives extend from the

characters represented in the drama, to the Beggar and Poet of its framing device, and into the audience itself. No one is securely outside the infrastructure of monetary transactions; there are no impartial spectators or judges. Nonetheless, Brewer's point is that the market forces that the opera critiques were pervasive in its afterlife through opportunistic productions and merchandising. In fact, Gay himself tried to capitalize on his own success by producing a sequel, *Polly*. Ironically, however, Gay's sequel failed to make it past the censors, even as a host of new ballad operas became the rage, though Gay's later musical *Achilles* playfully references the mushrooming ballad opera tradition that his own work had made popular.

The innovation of the ballad opera provided Gay with a powerful technique by which he could create allusive subtext and intertextual innuendo through the references that the traditional ballads evoked, which often ironized the actual words of the songs as Gay re-wrote them for his dramatic purposes. The ballad tunes would have had widespread recognition across classes. In a musical culture where popular songs had a range of political, social, and literary connotations, the songs as they are used in the opera play-off the lyrics they displace. In many cases, Gay's lyrics parody the familiar significance of a popular melody. For example, in Air XVI, "Over the Hills and Far Away," the romantic associations of the song work to contrast the sense of Macheath seducing—rather than serenading—Polly while, at the same, accentuating the innocence of Polly herself. Moreover, the words of Gay's lyrics show Polly and Macheath professing their love in terms of slavery and transportation, throwing us back into the political underworld at the exact moment when the lulling music promises to take us out of it. Dianne Dugaw notes a whole constellation of other references the song had, many with Jacobite political undertones; in short, she claims, "Polly's leave-taking resonates with England's farewell to the Stuart monarchy and the old order it represented" (184). In Air LIII, "Tom Tinker's My True

Love," a low love ditty, Macheath ironically laments of his inability to put up with his many wives. Air XIV, "Pretty Parrot, Say," replaces "parrot" with "Polly," thereby figuring Polly as senselessly echoing the pretty sounds she hears, which again emphasizes her sentimental naiveté. For an eighteenth-century audience, the songs would have had a metaleptic effect, as the meaning of the original lyrics supervened upon the words Gay wrote. The old lyrics retained a ghostly trace in the audience's memory against which Gay's new lyrics became ironized.

In fact, Dugaw points out that a couple of the ballads—"Twas When the Seas Were Roaring" and "Black-eyed Susan"—were Gay's own originals from his previous collaboration with Handel, *The What-d'Ye-Call-It*, of 1715, and his popular broadside ballad "Sweet William's Farewell to Black-eyed Susan." As Dugaw states, "these parodic echoes of 'Kitty Carrot' [a character in the earlier play] and 'Black-eyed Susan' in turn position Lucy and Polly as stock heroines who evoke the predicaments, stories, and contexts of their progenitors" (171). In other cases, Dugaw argues that the coloring of many of the songs undercut the romantic or heroic cast in which the protagonists see themselves, contrasting an aggrandized self-image to the sullied nexus of stock busts, legal wrangling, and political maneuvers that many of the ballads reference through their inscription in political contexts elsewhere. Such examples suggest the diversity of impressions that the redaction of "stolen" songs could produce when reincorporated into a dramatic context, as the frisson between old and new lyrics results in a meaning that differs from either. Likewise, the form of the ballad opera itself appropriates "low" cultural materials and refashions them into a relatively "high" cultural medium: in doing so, both valences are available while distorting each other.

Similar to the songs, which apply new words onto more traditional airs, *The Beggar's Opera* overlays different generic patterns to create gaps and superimpositions that mutually

inform or critique each other, and, by doing so, it creates a self-parody that simultaneously fulfills and frustrates several conflicting dramatic paradigms. Peachum and Lockit, as satiric stand-ins for the upper-class ministers Walpole and Townshend, for example, put in relief the heroic drama's nobility. Such gaps and veils act to lay bare or reveal through a more truthful mask the ideological assumptions that are encoded in such genres as the neoclassical tragedy, Restoration comedy, Renaissance tragicomedy, and Medieval passion play. The fissures between such generic models expose the ideological contradictions of masculinity, revealing the problematized nature of such related cultural concepts as the class-based system of honor, the legal fiction of women as property, the idea of charity in a thoroughly mercantile world, and the demands of a rapacious marketplace that ultimately overrides codes of chivalry, love, and Judeo-Christian values.

Unlike Gay's previous script *The What D' Ye Call It: A Tragi-Comi-Pastoral Farce,* which announces in its very title its indeterminate status (though, one should note that "Farce" is printed much larger than the rest on the title page), *The Beggar's Opera* is not a burlesque romp or a self-advertised generic olio to stump and delight fussy critics (57). In his preface to *The What D' Ye Call It*, Gay writes that "the whole Art of the Tragi-Comi-Pastoral Farce lies in interweaving the several Kinds of the Drama with each other so that they cannot be distinguish'd or separated" (174) and then concludes, after humorously dismissing critical objections to each appellation in turn by citing ancient precedent, that "Yet may I avoid the Cavils and Misinterpretations of severe Criticks, I have not call'd it a Tragedy, Comedy, Pastoral or Farce, but left the Name entirely undetermin'd" (177). Gay seems to have interwoven more various forms with greater seamlessness in *The Beggar's Opera*. Peter Lewis remarks that *The Beggar's Opera* is: "the most intricate and original experiment in a dramatic transformation by a writer

who specialized in deliberate generic confusion, sporting with conventions and turning one form into another" (122). Playing off one genre's conventions against another's, however, does more than produce confusion or a sportive conjuring trick. Gay's transumptive forms interrogate the underlying cultural assumptions that are inscribed in each genre.

If the structure of this comic opera consciously patterns itself after a neoclassical tragedy as well as a passion play, it also does much to discredit Polly's Pollyanna-like outlook that would quixotically transform the lowlife Macheath into a hero, such as when she says in Act I, "I have no reason to doubt you, for I find in the romance you lent me, none of the great heroes were ever false in love" (28). Of course, this signposts to the audience that he is *not* a model hero; rather, the dramatic irony is that the audience understands Polly as naively parroting (and parodying) chivalric discourse, applying heroic terms to a practiced rouge who will exact interest on his loan. Lockit both confirms the allusion while ironically denying its import when he remarks in Act III, "The vigor and prowess of a knight-errant never saved half the ladies in distress that he hath done" (63). Such "vigor and prowess" conflates having courageous virtue with being a *virtú* of courtesans since Lockit's point is that the female gang's "favorite child-getter" has allowed many ladies to get off a harsh sentence due to leniency toward those who were pregnant. Even when Macheath himself imitates a high, heroic mode by quoting Shakespeare, "'if music be the food of love, play on'," he recalls the Duke Orsino's opening speech from *Twelfth Night*, which continues, "Give me excess of it; that surfeiting, / The appetite may sicken and so die." That is, he imitates not a tragic, but a self-indulgent romantic hero—and a fickle romancer at that. Moreover, the quote is marked as citational, thereby acting as a meta-theatrical cue of distanciation, reminding the audience that they are at a play and Macheath is merely playing a part (or doubly playing a part). Both the metaleptic lyrics and the generic ambivalence work to

demonstrate Macheath and Polly's double nature, and the divergent systems of value that each of them simultaneously personifies.

III. The Christian Passion Play as Background

In the eighteenth-century, Christianity remained pervasive alongside the encroaching early capitalist ethos, and so Gay, in setting up a contrast with his mercantile underworld, very likely looked backward to forms that embodied a moral universe that could seem, at once, a stark alternative and a mirror-image. By placing the aristocratic rakes of Restoration comedy against an older tradition—the Christian passion play[12]—that still possessed cultural resonance, Gay could produce disjointed generic layers that produced the same kind of echoes as his ballad opera's lyrics. Gay uses these juxtapositions to reveal the already self-parodic nature of such previous models and mores. Perhaps, more surprising than the instability of the comic and tragic impulses in Gay's opera is the way that it highlights the relationship between paradigms of classical tragedy and the Christian passion play. At times these two precedents are seamlessly merged, such as Jenny Diver's betrayal in Act II, which is simultaneously the hero's self-defeat brought about by Macheath's tragic flaw of lust, an emblematic Judas kiss, and the cross he bears for being double-crossed by both Jenny and Jemmy (41). Maynard Mack points out, similarly, Mrs. Trapes's "Pilate-like washing of hands," (43) which may appear, by contrast, in a mock-

[12] Cultural contradictions are often the result of historical turning points wherein two or more ideological paradigms form complex interrelations; but as almost any era can be seen as a turning point in regard to some values, there are often plentiful contradictions within any given system of norms or set of generic conventions. In this regard, the gospel narrative itself is a self-parody, offering an ironic fulfillment of the Jewish prophecy of the Messiah. Christianity appropriates Judaic scripture, but, at the same time, undoes its expectations, producing a rupture (rather than a rapture) that critiques as well as continues the tradition of the Jewish law. Whereas Jews awaited a victorious, world-conquering king, Jesus was a lowly mechanic—carpenter, shepherd, and gadabout—who consorted with lepers, whores, and tax-collectors. The procession to the cross pointedly inverts the Roman triumph, replacing the king or general with a poor criminal riding on an ass whose trail was littered with palm leaves (a gift of victory turned into a symbol of peace), then mockingly crowned with thorns and ignominiously crucified.

heroic vein, a Scriblerian "art of sinking" applied to a tragic downfall; but against this lampoon a genuine tragic gravitas emerges, as Mack goes on to comment:

> As the play progresses… we begin to realize that this parody of tragic pattern is not simply a lighthearted joke, but the focus of the play's most serious implications. For Macheath's weakness for women proves a way of dramatizing a more paradoxical flaw in this "hero"; the error of supposing that the society he moves in honors any value except money. (42)

Macheath *is* a hero, relative to the opera's mercenary underworld that liquidates everything, reducing all to its monetary value. His "flaw"—abiding by the rules of gentleman's honor in a setting of universal hypocrisy—would be a redeeming one in the eyes of some in the audience who still insisted on residual Christian and chivalric notions. Macheath is consistently invoked as a romantic "hero" throughout the play, a gentleman-scoundrel who imitates, concurrently, a lord of the road and the Lord on his rood.

Whereas the dissonance between the allusions to Christian tragedy placed against the comic tone of the opera may initially lead one to view the effect as mock-heroic, the pairing can actually work the other way, so that the lowlife characters are elevated thereby to more solemn and substantial proportions. Harold Gene Moss writes that "the Christian virtues embodied in Macheath—his passionate love, his energetic support of life, his 'innocent' regard for his fellow man—fall before the brutal, coldly rationalistic motives of Peachum, Lockit, and their tool, Jenny Diver" (58). Moss notes the correspondence between the gang's carousal at the tavern that begins Act II and "the last supper" (58), the allusion to Cain and Abel in that act's opening

question “what is become of thy brother,” (31), and the motif of the cordial throughout the play, which seems to refer to transubstantiation. Indeed, the cordial’s transforming power—whether to help deceive and poison or to exalt and unify with fellow-feeling—seems obliquely to refer to the metamorphosis of water, wine, vinegar, and blood in the gospel narratives at moments of death and marriage. Though Moss argues that Macheath’s role as the “Christ-like victim” (60) begins to change when he “pleads for death” (62), one may also see this moment of Macheath’s abjection akin to the point where the Son asks the Father why he has been forsaken.

Looking to the mystery cycles themselves, one finds even more similarities, which reinforce the image of Macheath as an archetypal Christ figure. In the Chester Cycle, for instance, the pageant of “Christ’s Passion” has two principle groupings around Jesus, one being a gang of thievish Jews who gamble for the clothes off the back of their nominal king and the other, a gaggle of women, all of whom are named Mary: Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James, and Mary Salome (120-123). This tableau of different Marys resembles the proliferation of women—married or not—who surround Macheath as his death seems approaching. Macheath is, of course, the leader of a gang of thieves. He has the heretical status of both savior and outcast, ushering in the new economic laws.

In the Wakefield Cycle, the pageant of “The Buffetting” features an extended argument about whether Caiaphas can “appeach” Jesus for any of his crimes (121). The torturers claim that Christ “gets many fees from those he beguiles” and “would fain down bring our laws—if he had his way” (121). Caiphas suggest that Jesus offer him a bribe, and when he refuses Caiphas declares, “therefore shall I him hang,” (127). At the end of this pageant, however, Caiphas has the ironic recognition that “bribes mar many men” (137), seeing that he has been indicted by the very law that he has been overzealous to persecute. Caiphas and Jesus thus enact a struggle over

the conception of the law as domination and the law as justice, which the antagonism between Peachum and Macheath may be modeled upon. Such explicit parallels reinforce the idea that the mystery cycles are only one of many materials that Gay recycled in his opera.

In the York Cycle, in the pageant of "The Crucifixion," the soldiers who build the cross speak of their craftsmanship: "Since ilka thing is right arrayed / The wiselier now work may we" and, later:

> 3 Solider: Come forth, thou cursed knave,
> Thy comfort soon shall keel.
> 4 Soldier: Thine hire here shall thou have.
> 1 Solider: Walk on—now work we well. (213)

Their pride in their work, though it be of murder, killing the very thieves by which they gain their livelihood, savors of Peachum's declaration that "A lawyer is an honest employment; so is mine. Like me too he acts in a double capacity, both against rogues and for 'em; for 'tis but fitting that we should protect and encourage cheats, since we live by them" (6-7). The York Cycle's pageant has the additional irony, however, of being put on by the pinners, so that when the cross-builders' workmanship falls short of the mark—"Oh, this work is all unmeet— / This boring must all be amend" (216)—it reflects meta-theatrically on the workers whom have sponsored the production itself. The "boring" could be the pinner's failed cross or their boring of the audience itself, in either case evidence of shoddy workmanship on the boards. Whereas this could be interpreted as a reflexively self-deprecating joke on the guild, more likely the fact that the soldiers are able to achieve their end at all in nailing up Christ is a near miraculous labor in

the face of hardships from nature and heaven alike, which rebel at the act. Richard Beadle and Pamela M. King remark, "there is no doubt that the cycle was… intended to reflect the wealth and prestige of the city, particularly the economic pride and self-confidence of the merchants and master-craftsmen who financed performances annually" (ix). Yet, in that case, identification between audience members, actors, and the soldiers represented as skilled laborers takes on the oddly satiric effects produced in similar ways by *The Beggar's Opera* in its economic critique extending from the characters to the producers (represented by the figures of the Beggar and Player), and finally out to the audience. The communal enterprise of playmaking turns meta-theatrical in both cases to reflect on the material conditions of which each drama is a part, simultaneously celebrating and indicting those institutions and the audience's complicity with them.

Whereas the "poetic justice," of a classical tragedy, as the Beggar remarks at the opera's conclusion, must end with "Macheath… hanged; and the other personages… supposed… either hanged or transported," the Player retorts that "The catastrophe is manifestly wrong" (82). The Beggar agrees, "Let the prisoner be brought back to his wives in triumph" (82). Macheath is absurdly—or, miraculously, as it were—resurrected by an authorial power outside the diegetic world of the play, a quasi-God-like figure: the question of what "this kind of drama" is "depends" (as the play itself puns) on how things will be made to hang together at the end. Viewed not so much as an opera, but rather as a (mock) passion play—a native English, communal musical-dramatic form that was likewise interpolated with hymns and secular verses—the mention of the "triumph" takes on an added irony. Literally a victorious procession into Rome by a commander to demonstrate the spoils of war (OED), "triumph" equivocally invokes a pageant of Roman bellicosity and its inversion by the gospel narrative.

The "triumph" of Macheath, a name signifying "son of the earth," embodies both this Christian reversal *and* the celebration of a successful whoremaster of a "Captain," though it adds further layers of irony, as well. At the play's denouement, just when we might expect the glorious consummation of a Christ-figure among his apostles, Macheath announces, "Thus I stand like the Turk, with his doxies around; / From all sides their glances his passion confound" (83). The passage puns on "doxy," meaning trull or prostitute in Vagabonds' Cant and a confirmed opinion, such as an orthodoxy (OED); there is also a pun on "passion" as a desire, illicit in this case, and passion as the sufferings of Christ (OED). Hence, Macheath's subtext announces a turning away from a Christian passion play and toward an Islamic harem, perhaps recalling the so-called tragic "Turk plays" of the Renaissance, in which the "Turk's" excessive jealousy or passion ends in misplaced revenge. It also likely references the tradition of heroic drama. Bridget Orr writes that "*The Siege of Rhodes* inaugurated the heroic drama, the genre which encoded English imperial ambition and anxieties in the Restoration and this role precluded too subversive a modulation of Orientalizing tropes" (67). Whereas *Aureng-Zebe* disrupts the heroic genre by presenting a thoroughly "foreign" world with no Christian characters—yet one in which the British audience may thereby more readily see a representation of themselves—*The Beggar's Opera* subverts heroic representations by depicting the hero's conversion into the other. Macheath, the play's Christ figure, has finally "turned Turk," presaging his masquerade in blackface in *Polly*, a guise that represents both his enslavement to his passions and his abandonment of social laws. At the same time, however, the revels of the marry widows—though they are at last revealed as neither married nor widows—confirms a joyous church of love (even if the love in this case is more physical than spiritual) united with the body of their Christ figure.

The Beggar's Opera deftest trick may be romanticizing Macheath into a Christ-like figure only to reveal that he is an unrepentant and unreformed rake at the end, the sentimental elevation the audience accorded the hero shown up and thrown in their faces as legitimating little more than his turning Turk to turn more tricks. Peter Lewis describes Gay's approach as a "Scriblerian fun-bomb" that "transforms the (supposedly) tragic into comedy, sentiment into a source of humour" (134). Miraculously—or absurdly—the different genres in *The Beggar's Opera* all manage to hang together, giving life to a new form, even while demonstrating rifts in the cultural logic of eighteenth-century England, which was divided between the vestiges of Christian morality and aristocratic authority in the face of the emerging capitalist world order.

IV. The New Man as an Old Rake

Though Macheath might take on heroic qualities, he is, of course, also a villain. Despite his aura of Christian and romance associations, Macheath is a knave who slips through the legal loopholes of both wedlock and prison locks. But in this he is no worse than the average Restoration rake, and possesses the glamor of that character type. His evasion of social discipline by bribing, cajoling, wheedling, or betraying different authorities is no different than the means those same authorities, namely Peachum and Lockit, use to maintain their power. The very fetters Macheath wears in prison ironically confirm his status: Lockit says, "If I had the best gentleman in the land in my custody, I could not equip him more handsomely" (44). There is a double sense, however, in Lockit's comparing him to the best gentleman in the land. On the one hand, Macheath preserves a sense of his honor and duty to his gang of fellows, yet, on the other hand, Macheath stands in line to inherit Peachum's position. He is at once a Robin Hood hero and a scheming politician, the ringleader of outlaws and the heir apparent to run a "respectable"

business. Macheath has displayed a capacity to manipulate, fraud, and buy off others, and thus may soon become the best "gentleman" in the land in the play's wholly opposite sense of one corrupted and besotted by power. Macheath generally appears most like a villain, then, when his behavior can be least differentiated from Peachum's.

Nevertheless, perhaps the most crucial aspect in regarding Macheath as a sentimental hero is the extent to which he *echoes* Peachum—both live under a false pretense of marriage. Early in the play Peachum, when he is told Polly has married Macheath, lectures her:

> Married! The Captain is a bold man, and will risk anything for money; to be sure he believes her a fortune. Do you think your mother and I should have lived comfortably so long together if we had ever been married? Baggage!

While Peachum may wrongly impute to Macheath his own pecuniary motives as his reason for wooing Polly, Peachum nevertheless insinuates, no doubt correctly, that Macheath hopes to overtake Peachum's own position in the criminal hierarchy, and views the Captain's boldness as a serious threat. Moreover, Peachum reveals that a wife is little more than the deadweight of a ball-and-chain, or (perhaps in a pun) excess "baggage." If we expect a contrast between Macheath and Peachum, however, we do not find it in this regard. True, Peachum may nominally avoid marriage while observing all its punctilios—treating his relationship as a purely business arrangement; Macheath, by contrast, embraces several marriages in little but name while fleeing the attendant punishments—acting entirely from insatiable lust. This difference collapses, though, since both deploy the title of marriage while skirting its responsibilities, whether of love or fidelity.

Understood against the pattern of a rake in a Restoration comedy, Macheath both fulfills and violates the conventions. J. Douglas Canfield observes that "the audience's expectation that the Beggar's intended ending really threatens is the typical Restoration socialization of the rake through marriage to the eminently desirable heroine" ("Critique of Capitalism," 322). We expect, therefore, that the rake's excess will be disciplined by marriage rather than death, given the lighthearted manner in which Gay treats his dark milieu. Macheath's last-minute reprieve seems to conform to such a narrative, as does his choice of Polly to dance with him at the end. Nonetheless, as Canfield remarks, "By reflexively calling attention to the wish-fulfillment quality of the new ending, Gay undercuts it…. Surrounded as he [Macheath] is at the end by six wives and several bastards, he is not a convincing candidate for reformation" ("Critique of Capitalism," 323). The conclusion offers us neither the fantasized consolations of a comedy's marriage, in which the reprobate is at last corrected and welcomed back into the social fold, nor the pious morality of a tragic death, in which the recidivist finally meets his just desserts.

Marriage, for Macheath, *would* be death since he is a hero by virtue of his vice: his ennobling freedom is based on his vigorous pursuit of his own passions. Yet, such passions parody conventional middle-class respectability. Macheath desires sexual satisfaction instead of treating marriage as mere property exchange, and he is unscrupulous about his methods of gaining money, unlike the small-time indulgences of merchants who would skim the coffers or fix the books for petty advantages. Macheath tells Polly, "Whenever you are talking of marriage, I am thinking of hanging," as the marriage knot is also the gallows' knot in his rakish worldview (54). His homosocial loyalty to the gang results from the same impulse that impels him to his profligate behavior with women: he follows the dictates of his heart, faithful or fickle as these may be, in an environment that negates the softer warmth of sentiment in favor of cold hard cash.

Marriage is only another contract in this context, signalizing monetary negotiations and comportment to a corrupt law, which would constrict Macheath's lust for more life.

V. The Unending Debates about the Ending

The complex imbrication of diverse forms and ideologies converges most emphatically at the play's conclusion, where the vacillation between different generic models apparently needs to issue in a definitive outcome. The conventions of genre are a series of expectations, and nowhere are these expectations more pronounced than at an ending, which is largely constitutive of a genre since many violations of form along the way can be excused as incidental. Yet, the ending of the *The Beggar's Opera* has been an endless source of contention, from the reaction of audiences in Gay's time up to current critical debates. Macheath's reprieve can be viewed, for instance, as variously as a capitulation to the sordid marketplace that operates by bribery and thieving or as an extradiegetic, god-like dispensation of Christian forgiveness. The tragic trajectory of the play is undercut not only by the lowlife characters, the ballad airs, and the zestful comic wit, but literally cut short by the *dues ex machina* of the finale's reprieve. Nonetheless, the pathos of the seemingly star-crossed romance between Macheath and Polly is modeled on archetypes of tragic and Christian heroism. Arguing for Macheath's reprieve, the Beggar answers the Player's remark that, "An opera must end happily" by saying, "For you must allow that in this kind of drama 'tis no matter how absurdly things are brought about" (82), begging the question of what type of dramatic play we *are* witnessing. While the Beggar's jibe seems aimed at Italian *opera seria*, it may also apply to native English forms such as heroic drama, tragicomedy, and the mystery cycle, all of which frequently rescue their heroes from

death or ruin at the last moment with a final reversal of the wheel of fate. Calhoun Winton notes that:

> But as in the case of specific political satire, burlesque of *opera seria* is not central to Gay's artistic purposes; one's enjoyment of *The Beggar's Opera* does not depend on knowledge of baroque opera, any more than our enjoyment of the satiric treatment of Great Men and their ambitions depend on knowing what Robert Walpole and the opposition thought about each other. (127)

Nonetheless, as I hope to have shown, an appreciation of the different generic tensions at work in the opera can help us understand its appeal. Especially since so much of the humor derives from upsetting expectations, teasing out what those expectations are may aid our enjoyment and understanding. Nowhere may this be truer than when examining the implications of the conclusion.

When the Beggar abruptly changes course to revoke Macheath's death sentence, the Player remarks, "All this we must do to comply with the taste of the town" (82). In other words, the Player has insisted on selling-out, sacrificing truth and justice to fame and money, and convincing the Beggar to do likewise. The mercenary values that ruled the world within the opera seem to have leaked out and corrupted the framing narrative, as well. Spilling from one diegetic level to another, the audience itself is implicated. Ronald Paulson has written that the Beggar's substitutes "a happy ending for the hanging of Macheath" because the hanging "would have made all the Macheaths in the audience too uncomfortable" (62). Though Paulson seems to view Macheath as an exponent of the play's hypocritical principles, and thus a satiric indictment

of those same principles among the audience, in reality Macheath is too close to being a sentimental hero, as well. His demise would also signalize the downfall of a swashbuckler following his passionate impulses, overcoming societal pressures and refusing to palliate his more "natural" instincts. Thus, many theatre-goers (now and in the past) are apt to identify with Macheath as a man of feeling rather than a calculating and cold-hearted cutthroat.

The scandal of the ending is not that this scapegrace eludes his imminent sentence, but that the death-knell does not convincingly transform into a wedding bell. The rake's progress results in a celebration of his libertine ways, a dance among the various women he has conned and whored. Hence, the taste of the town is thrown in the audience's face—and the supposedly happy ending is a far more biting satire since those who might have seen themselves in Macheath are exposed as unreformed and riotous double-dealers, too, for with the concluding dance we see that Macheath has manipulated the marriage market as much as Peachum has the black market.

The ending precipitates the recognition that the two systems of honor that distinguish Macheath from Peachum are, in fact, not materially different. Earlier, Macheath proclaims that "a man who loves money might as well be contented with one guinea as I with one woman" (35). The analogy between avarice and lust suggests that both reduce to a more basic acquisitive desire in terms of which the hero, Macheath, and the villain, Peachum, are equally willing to sacrifice their word, their work, and their lives. Macheath's request that his gang "bring those villains to the gallows before you" (80) in order to take revenge on Peachum and Lockit shows that all alike accept the dog-eat-dog mentality while hypocritically appearing loyal as dogs. As Michael Denning writes, "it is clear that though there are two types of rogues, all are rogues; that though there are two types of predators, all are predators; and that whatever their pleasure, sex and money are not far apart in all minds" (106). Thus, Macheath's joyous release to dance among his

harem suggests not only his victory, but simultaneously the victory of Peachum, who remains at large, delighted with his ill-gained money. Both cheaters get off (in many senses), and, contrary to the Beggar's intended ending in which "for the other personages [besides Macheath], the audience must have supposed they were all either hanged or transported" (82), we witness a carnival where everyone is in cahoots, the audience included. The ending thus celebrates—and satirizes—the audience's self-deceitful preferences.

The dance of the "wives" echoes the dance of the chain-gang earlier in the same act, which occurs directly before Macheath's extended drunken aria that parodies heroic drama's stoic death speeches while paralleling the transubstantiation's wine-into-blood. Macheath's impending death awakens "the prisoners whose trials are put off till next session" (78). It is as if, Christ-like, the sacrifice of Macheath atones and forgives his fellow prisoners as they lament with the sorrowful noise of their heavy chains and yet likewise celebrate with the joyful music, which issues from the orchestra, in a *danse macabre*. Though Macheath may redeem the criminals and sinners, at least temporarily, he also unites them in their death (80). Even Macheath's seemingly cynical observation that:

> —That Jeremy Twitcher should peach me, I own surprised me. 'Tis plain proof that the world is all alike, and that our gang can no more trust one another than other people. Therefore, I beg you gentlemen, look well to yourselves, for in all probability you may live some months longer (80)

reckons humanity as one lump while recalling each individual to his astonishingly rapid mortality. Furthermore, Twitcher's peaching resembles Peter's denials, emphasizing that even

the most trustworthy member of a "gang" may betray it, though, in the Biblical case, Peter was surprised at his own renunciation, which Jesus predicted. The passage re-enacts the gospel narrative while skewing its import: does "look well to yourselves" mean Everyman should prepare for his spiritual afterlife or does it imply since every man is for himself, each should get his own while he still can? The jarring ambiguity resounds with an ironic double edge similar to the polysemous locution of such terms as "court"—meaning, variously, courtiers, court of law, to woo, or courtesy and its chivalric associations (OED)—and "account," which trades repeatedly on its monetary and spiritual significations, starting with Peachum opening his account book that is also a book of judgment (6), as such tropes reverberate and transpose throughout the text.

Likewise, Macheath's choice of Polly at the end of the play is highly equivocal. He tells the ladies, "we will have no controversy now," as if he were admonishing the different sects of a church he is uniting. "I am sure she who thinks herself my wife will testify her joy by a dance," (83) Macheath next declares, appropriating the language of the court-room proceeding that would have peached him. He also, of course, enacts a faux-marriage ceremony that concludes a commedia in the same breath that he raises doubts about the validity of both matrimony and testimony, which are ultimately backed only by the word (or Word). The dance resembles the dance of cuckolds at the conclusion of Wycherly's *The Country Wife*, but with the gender of the dancers reversed. In a series of two-faced remarks between his public and his private persona, Macheath says:

> I take Polly for mine. [*To* Polly.] And for life, you slut, for we were really married. [*To the other ladies*.] As for the rest— (*To* Polly) But at present keep your own secret. (83)

Whereas the chain-gang danced for death, he takes Polly "for life," confirming (at least to her) that they really were married all along. Yet, the inconclusive dash hints that he may well connive to persuade each lady that they were "really married" since he admonishes Polly to keep their marriage secret. The unfinished remark about "the rest" may even connote death and the afterlife, as in the phrase "rest in peace"; the concluding remark's lack of statement may thereby refer to our ignorance of what is to come. Macheath's announcement of taking Polly for his own may just be one more short-lived thievery. Macheath thus becomes a bountiful patriarch who spreads his seed along several lines of disputable legitimacy. The legal aegis that satirically hangs over the entire play alludes to not only marriage vows and a social contract but to the Abrahamic covenant that is at the ambiguous origin of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Polly, the first or more legitimate wife, is barren so far in the drama while Lucy (along with several other ladies who rush on-stage at the end) has already been impregnated by Macheath.

By opting for "Polly," Macheath may be signaling that he will remain as confirmed in his polyamorous (or polygamous) worship of ladies as ever, faithful only to his own infidelity with Lucy and the other women whom he plays fast and loose. Since in *The Beggar's Opera* promises are only words "performed," (44), contracts can be manipulated as rhetoric, dress alone determines status (69), and the law is easier bent than made binding, Macheath, like all gigolos and gentlemen in the play's theatrical world, only has a covenant with his own covetousness. "Poll," Polly's nickname, in fact, also means "to behead" as well as a "deed poll" (a legal contract that binds only one party) while her last name "peach" is synonymous with charging someone with a crime and slang for a desirable young girl (OED). As a peach, she is a savory morsel, an unfruitful wife, and a forbidden fruit that brings about Macheath's fall; she may also stand as his impeachment (impediment) while her charge that they were married impeaches

(discredits) him with Lucy. Hence, Macheath's choice resonates with contradictory meanings that foreshadow a more tragic, or farcical, fate even as the play seems to end happily, with the ever-present emblem of the gallows-tree converted into the sign of the cross or the tree of life.

In conclusion, *The Beggar's Opera* overlays different generic patterns to create gaps and superimpositions that mutually inform and critique each other. By doing so, the opera creates a self-parody that simultaneously fulfills and frustrates several conflicting dramatic and ideological paradigms. Such cleavages and veils act to lay bare or bear out a more truthful mask. The transposition of designs such as the Restoration comedy's rake and the passion play's Christ figure expose the ideological contradictions shaping concepts of masculinity. The opera reveals a portrait of how masculine identities had to adapt to a rapidly commercializing culture that was still under the sway of both Christian and aristocratic ideals. In doing so, the opera implicates the audience's own participation in the distortion of previous ideals into new hypocrisies. Yet, the opera owns itself as part of the same commercial world that it depicts. It offers no transcendental viewpoint by which the contradictions it portrays may be escaped or irrevocably judged. The opera, its characters, and its audiences alike are married to multiple systems of belief; they are manacled to outmoded ideological structures while trying to masquerade those chains as the fashionable rings of an all-pervasive and all-perverting capitalist new world order.

Rough Trade-Offs: Sex, Capitalism, and Genre-Queering in *The London Merchant*

The London Merchant similarly demonstrates the transformation of values taking place in the eighteenth century. Like *The Beggar's Opera*, it takes part of its inspiration from the low ballad tradition since its plot is a redaction of "The Ballad of George Barnwell." It, too, seeks to

lend gravitas to its middle-class characters and professes an uneasy mix of aristocratic chivalry, mercantile ambition, and Christian charity. The Puritanical, didactic nature of the play has long been emphasized. Stephen L. Trainor, Jr., for example, demonstrates how the play follows Calvinistic homiletic theory such that "both the playwright and the preacher seek by an affective presentation of the nature of sin to bring their audiences to a recognition of the evil within themselves" (512). However, self-parody results in *The London Merchant* from the way that the play's classically tragic action has been shadowed and compromised by other genres such as libertine comedy, she-tragedy, heroic drama, and Christian redemption narrative. With these alternative patterns and conventions hovering in its background, normative assumptions about class, gender, and sexual orientation that are inscribed by tragedy's generic and neoclassical rules—as well as by the play's ostensible merger of Christian charity and mercantile work ethic— are undercut, sent up, and queered. Thus, Lillo's drama troubles many of the assumptions behind the traditional generic norms that he ostensibly adopts even while the play strives to meet most of tragedy's formal and affective demands. In short, given these generic complications, the clear didactic lessons that the play appears to present are far more ambivalent than most critics have hitherto acknowledged, and, in many cases, are entirely undermined.

I. Imperiled Moral Polarities

To many audiences and critics, *The London Merchant* presents a stark contrast of moral opposites. This traditional understanding of the play, however, is challenged both by an examination of its historical reception and a more nuanced reading of its structure and characters. Lisa A. Freeman notes that "the structure . . . [of] most readings of *The London Merchant* remains primarily binary," (547) yet "the problem Millwood poses is not that her business

practices are so different than Thorowgood's, but rather that they are so similar" (553). Freeman argues that such "contradictions" and "discursive gaps" (543) are repressed in the play, the problems of capitalism displaced upon Millwood's violation of gender roles, and the paradoxes of the hero's tragic flaw used to promulgate a nationalist ideology. Nevertheless, Freeman acknowledges that the play consistently troubles the dichotomy of moral evaluation, which many critics have applied to it. Roberta F. S. Borkat, in a similar vein, observes a "disturbing disjunction between the announced moral aims of the play and the actual effects of events within it" (291). The play's admitted gestures toward sentimental tears, pious truisms, and capitalist apologetics have made it seem appalling for contemporary readers for many of the same reasons that audience members of the eighteenth-century may have found it attractive. Yet, closer readings of the play reveal that *The London Merchant* consistently disturbs the categories that appear to define its moral polarities.

This disjunction between the didactic overtures of the play and the actual affective and interpretive meanings that audiences have found in it is not merely a result of more modern critical sensibilities being brought to bear on an older period piece. Samuel Richardson, it is true, recommends the play for its edifying effect in his tract *The Apprentice's Vade Mecum*, singling out *The London Merchant* as the "one Instance. . . where the Stage condescended to make itself useful to the City-Youth, by the dreadful Example of the Artifices of a lewd Woman, and the Seduction of an unwary young Man" (16). Despite Richardson's declaring a moralizing exceptionality to the play, though, he censures the theater more generally for presenting only "the wretched group of Rogues, form'd from the Characters of *Shepherd*, *Jonathan Wild*, *Blueskin*, and, in fine, from every Rogue that has made a noise in the World by his superlative Wickedness" (12-13). It is possible, given such a context, however, that some audience members

would have assimilated Millwood as a female version of these "heroic" theatrical rogues and master-criminals—not the least of which was Macheath—that Richardson rebukes. In this light, the audience would possibly have been prepared to view Millwood's villainy as part of the character type shaped by these popular "heroic" outlaws, even if they were not apt to sympathize with her entirely. Richardson's moralistic response elides the complicity that Barnwell has in his seduction as well as the degree to which his death-knell conversion can efface his crimes, which are also ironically on par with the celebrated criminals he mentions.

More to the point, Charles Lamb complained of the *corrupting* influence of the play, saying sarcastically, "it is putting things into the heads of good young men, which they would never otherwise have dreamt of. Uncles that think anything of their lives should fairly petition the Chamberlain against it" (294). Likewise tongue-in-cheek about the efficacy of the play's moral is Charles Dickens's assessment in Chapter 15 of *Great Expectations.* Wopsle reads Pip the play, in a sententious effort to improve the young apprentice, and Pip's reaction contains a great deal of irony, as he simultaneously completely identifies with Barnwell and repudiates his callowness: "At once ferocious and maudlin, I was made to murder my uncle with no extenuating circumstances whatever" (115). As Dickens's and Lamb's comments make clear, there is a countervailing tendency in the play that upsets the gravity of the moral lessons it has been thought by some to impart. The schematic moral dichotomy in the play is consistently troubled. Rather than judge the play against its purportedly edifying aim, and conclude that it is a failure, though, it may prove more instructive to read the breakdown of binary oppositions—not least of these its ability to merge comedic motifs, character types, and plots within a so-called tragedy—as the play's most successful feature.

II. Genre-Queering

The London Merchant utilizes a strategy, which I term "genre-queering," wherein legible generic categories are co-opted to act as mutual screens. By both covering and exposing a play of surfaces and expectations, this process creates an indeterminate, queer narrative space that allows its characters to simultaneously inhabit multiple ideological and desiderative identities. The drama's comedic pattern derives from the plot as much as from the middle-class personages depicted, since characters of the "middling classes" were far more typical of comedic genres. In terms of action, until the graveyard scene and subsequent murder at the end of Act III, the action of the drama feels modeled more on a libertine comedy than any form of tragic plotline. We are presented with the "rakish" seduction of a young naïf, who may yet escape to discover a more "honest" form of love. The debauched Millwood inveigles the unworldly Barnwell into her sexual snares while the innocent Maria secretly pines in the wings. Nevertheless, even in this characterization, the gender roles have been reversed—Millwood is the rake while Barnwell is the naïf. Barnwell's innocence positions him as similar to the passive female protagonist in she-tragedies whose honor is violated by unscrupulous, self-serving males. Laura Brown writes that "In Lillo's drama… the suffering woman is replaced by the middle-class male hero" (*English Dramatic Form*, 436). Furthermore, this effeminizing of Barnwell may also act to code him as queer.

Throughout the play, there is the strong suggestion that Barnwell's true love-interest, which is not Maria, but rather Trueman. Despite restrictions on expressing such desires in the context of an increasingly moralistic stage, Barnwell's passion for Trueman becomes quite explicit late in the play. If *The London Merchant* skews even its resemblance to a libertine comedy in its first few acts through reversals in class, gender, and sexual orientation, that earlier genre was,

nonetheless, familiar with slumming, gender-bending, and pansexual exploits. Though the play tempers much of its potentially comic dialogue with moral overtones, and avoids what William H. McBurney calls, "the hazard of a comic subplot," which resulted in "catcalls" in Lillo's previous effort, "muted humor is, nevertheless present": certain lines of repartee "must have sounded familiar to those spectators, who, a month earlier and in the same theater, had heard Congreve's Lady Wishfort ask the same questions" as Millwood (xix). The tone of the seduction is ambivalent—at least until Barnwell murders his uncle—and we might be inclined to laugh at George Barnwell's (or George Lillo's) simplicity at imputing such high-strung pathos to the same material that comedies routinely treated with the flippancy of wit.

Barnwell's murder of his uncle marks the play's irrevocable, and somewhat abrupt, turn toward a sentimental or sermonizing Christian tragedy. Unlike Barnwell's sins of youthful frolics and stolen money, which may later be rectified or recovered through marital or material means, his uncle's body cannot be brought back from the dead. The play represents his earlier peccadillos as a "gateway drug" to his later ghastly deeds, such as in Barnwell's long soliloquy when he reasons, "The impetuous passion bears down all before it and drives me on to lust, to theft, and murder. Oh, conscience, feeble guide to virtue, who only shows us when we go astray but wants the power to stop us in our course!" (50). Barnwell speaks of murder as a natural, even inevitable consequence of lust, as if his fate had been written out for him, whether theatrically or religiously (Lillo, in fact, was a Dissenter believing in predestination). However, directly afterward, Barnwell puts on a mask and exclaims, "Ha! No struggles conscience!" (50). Thus, Barnwell's speech is raving rather than rational, an excuse he makes to himself even while admitting to feeling the forepangs of guilt for the murder he is contemplating. The mask covers his face as his soliloquy attempts to cover his scruples.

The image of Barnwell's theological "fall" as a "hoary cascade" making him "doomed to act" as he "stiffen[s] with horror at [his] own impiety" is undercut by the pun on "whore" that blames Millwood for his actions, and the stiffening (whether anticipating a little death or a large one) that simultaneously attracts him. After the murder, Barnwell asks his dying uncle to kiss him, the only instance of a kiss in the play—Millwood, Maria, and even Trueman only receive embraces while on stage. While this kiss of death is also a kiss of forgiveness, the pure homosociality of its nature is called into question. After the kiss, the stage directions reflect that the uncle "*Groans and dies*" while Barnwell "*Swoons away upon his uncle's dead body*" (52). The swooning reinforces the feminization of Barnwell at the same time that it—along with the groaning, "dying," and the prone or overlapping bodies—suggests a more robust homoerotic encounter. The scene displaces the off-stage consummation of the liaison between Millwood and Barnwell that (supposedly) directly led to the murder, transposing that relationship onto two males of uncertain filiation and connection. The passionate scene wherein Barnwell murders his uncle, which is rendered visible contrary to classical decorum, replaces and substitutes for the sexual activity between Barnwell and Millwood that the play merely suggests. In doing so, Barnwell's carnal sin symbolically transpires with homoerotic rather than hetero-normative overtones. Hence, the play concatenates in a single image its affirmation of homosocial bonds (the pious old man, who would have bestowed his inheritance on Barnwell), ambiguous overtures to homoerotic passion (the sexualized reading of their encounter), and the denigration of heterosexual relations (murder as equivalent to consorting with a female whore, which is the only overt heterosexual interaction in the drama).

Barnwell's subsequent lament shows just how over-determined his affiliation with his uncle is:

> Murder the worst of crimes, and parricide the worst of murders, and this the worst of parricides. Cain, who stands on record from the birth of time and must to its final period as accursed, slew a brother favored above him. Detested Nero, by another's hand, dispatched a mother that he feared and hated. But I, with my own hand, have murdered a brother, mother, father, and a friend most loving and beloved. This execrable act of mine's without a parallel. (52)

Barnwell's uncle is figured as anything *but* an uncle—he becomes feminized as a "mother" at the same time that he is turned into a Christian "brother," a surrogate "daddy," and finally a "friend," one meaning of which is "a lover or paramour, of either sex" (OED). Later, in the final act, Barnwell confesses, "I was born to murder all who love me," (71) reinforcing the impression that his relations with his uncle are somehow more than merely avuncular, especially considering that both Thorowgood and Trueman have already divulged their "love" to him. The play also puns on "devoted" as meaning "vowed," "zealously attached," and "consigned to evil, doomed" (OED). Hence, the phrase "loving and beloved" has connotations of Christian, familial, homosocial, and sexual love, even as the genre of the play itself is tacitly challenged by proclaiming the murder has no precedent, and thus troubling the notion of how it should be regarded. Neither Christian nor classical, though gesturing that it merges both modes of tragedy, the play acknowledges itself instead to be something queer and unclassifiable. The residual echoes of libertine comedy are nevertheless reasserted even at the crux of the play's moment of high-flown, sentimental pathos.

Likewise, the "tragic" last words of Barnwell in the final prison scenes are accompanied by a subtext of homoerotic tension. Earlier in the play Trueman acts like Barnwell's jealous and

jilted lover. Trueman, upon returning to bid farewell to Barnwell in the prison, provokes Barnwell's odd confession that, "Thus good and generous as you are, I should have murdered you," to which Trueman responds, "We have not yet embraced, and may be interrupted. Come to my arms!" (72). The logic of Barnwell's statement implies, again, an equivalence between (large, unspeakable) desires and (little, unrepresentable) deaths, so that Trueman's request to "embrace" before they are "interrupted" reads as a plea to consummate their relationship, further reinforcing that the earlier scene in which Barnwell killed his uncle was a coded portrayal of a homoerotic encounter. There is probably even a slight play-on-words in his ejaculation of "Come to my arms!" as "arms" also signifies a weapon. Understood using the figures of Barnwell's implicit metaphors, Trueman is reciprocally declaring his desire to "murder" Barnwell.

The rhetoric of their dialogue then becomes quite lush and gushing as they offer themselves as a mutual sacrifice to one another during an "intercourse of woe," lying down together on a "rugged couch" (72-73). They "sigh" and "groan" and "mingle tears" as Barnwell tells Trueman "pour all your griefs into my breast, and in exchange take mine" (73). The economy of this affective "exchange" substitutes for a monetary transaction, which both contrasts with and alludes to Barnwell's sexual trade with Millwood. Upon their embrace, Barnwell chides Trueman, "take, take some of the joy that overflows my breast!" and Trueman answers, "I do, I do! Almighty Power, how have you made us capable to bear, at once, the extremes of pleasure and of pain" (73). The repeated "I do" echoes a comedy's marriage ceremony as the two friends are physically joined together by tears and overflowing—perhaps overlapping—breasts. Moreover, the "overflowing" demonstrates how this exchange is not based on a principle of scarcity. Of course, audiences have responded to this scene as touching homosocial sentiment; but eighteenth-century theater-goers would probably likewise have

recognized the libertine touches, too. The friends bear a mutual sorrow even as they swoon and lay their grief "bare." In fact, one could read Trueman's praise of the power that conjoined such pleasure and pain as Lillo's authorial reference to his ability to coalesce the rhetoric of libertine comic pleasure and Christian tragic pain into a single scene.

Barnwell, just previous to Trueman's entrance, confesses to Thorowgood that he "taste[s] a pleasure more than mortal," which, while seeming to allude to his heavenly hopes, may also point to the more earthly desires he expects to fulfill with his friend Trueman. Catherine Ingrassia recognizes that the play "figures normative activity—and by extension normative masculinity—within an exclusively homosocial (and at times seemingly homoerotic) context. By contrast, active heterosexual pursuits are cast as unreliable and unremunerative, just like the speculative models they implicitly emulate" (100). Thorowgood tacitly sanctions the homoerotic encounter between the male friends by bringing Trueman along, and then leaving the scene so the two can be together. Unlike his affair with Millwood that results in wasted resources, Barnwell's relationship with Trueman is based on bonds that help to strengthen the contract he has with his employer, and thus solidifies the familial alternative provided by the apprentice system of labor, as well as the larger economic system in which it is embedded. Even Maria, courted by aristocratic suitors, represents the instability of the heterosexual marriage market, which is based on another type of speculation, as the time and attention lavished on gaining her hand by her various suitors may come to naught. Thus, in one sense, the consummation between Barnwell and Trueman depicts an exchange where the consumer knows what he is getting, and the buyer would *not* need to beware despite the illicit nature of such passion, rather than a hetero-normative marriage courtship or the employment of a prostitute, both of which risk a heedless

gamble (that the marriage will not materialize for the former; the potential harm to one's reputation, character, or body due to venereal diseases for the latter).

III. Discursive Sexualities and Intersectional Identities

The London Merchant shows how the discursive formation of sexuality, imbricated with other social constructions such as class, may become subject to intersections of other identity formations. The play operates by a supervenience of different sexual, generic, and class identities onto the same character. Just as genres are both constituted by—and presuppose—clear character types, sexual identities can only be perceived against a background that assumes structures of class identity. The deviousness of Maria's allocating money behind her father's back and Thorowgood's possibly untoward capitalist endeavors connect these characters to their underworld opposites, not only in terms of class, but also in terms of sexuality, which thereby has implications for the generic frames of reference that one applies to the play. Such categories as gender, sexuality, class, and genre are largely co-constitutive, and so, to render one aspect of a character's identity ambiguous is to displace that character from a more normative representation in another category. The very markers that create putatively distinct cultural categories are thus juxtaposed in the play to highlight the instabilities that undergird taxonomic schemes. To track how this process operates, however, one must first recognize the different valences that intersect in the text.

Surprisingly few critics, though, have even acknowledged the homoerotic innuendo of scenes in the play. Catherine Ingrassia writes that "*The London Merchant* depicts a culture where these homosocial relationships seemingly supplant all other emotional connections and function as structural or what Eve Sedgwick terms 'ideological homosexuality'" (107). Given the

prohibitions on fornication and even association with members of the opposite sex to which an apprentice was subjected, the only choices an apprentice had for making affective bonds were among a society of other men. Nonetheless, Ingrassia consigns to a footnote the alternative view of the scene as something more than "ideologically" homosexual: "Another important line of interpretation can be teased out through the fine line between homosocial and homoerotic behavior. A new level of cultural awareness existed concerning the homoerotic subculture in London, specifically as manifested by the so-called Molly house in the early eighteenth-century" (108). As Ingrassia claims, teasing out this interpretation is important to understanding the sense of the play for its eighteenth-century no less than for its modern-day readerships. By sanctioning Barnwell and Trueman's relationship—which can be interpreted as both homoerotic and violently inclined—*The London Merchant* reveals a subtext that belies its moralistic veneer.

Any expression of an apprentice's sexuality was looked on as illicit, in violation of the covenant of indenture, not only homoerotic encounters with fellow apprentices or frequenting bawdyhouses, but marriage, as well. Sexual activities were thought to interfere with the apprentice's capacity for labor. Joan Lane recounts in her history of apprenticeship in England that, "clearly, the problem of adolescent sexuality was a considerable one… Defoe complained that the increase in bachelorhood by the early eighteenth century… led directly to prostitution" (194). An apprentice such as Barnwell, then, was as much sexually exploited by his master, who provided him necessaries in exchange for his chastity and labor, as he would have been by any designing woman such as Millwood. Defoe's argument, in fact, hints that Thorowgood and Millwood are really two sides of the same pernicious coin: the system of indenture that severely limits an apprentice's sexual life effectively forces him to resort to prostitutes, who would likely have comprised another class of exploited workers themselves.

Another intersection between Millwood as prostitute and Trueman as gay male paramour occurs in the context described by Rictor Norton:

> The [mid-eighteenth-century as opposed to late seventeenth-century] commentators upon morality probably could not deal with the concept of homosexuality except by labelling its practitioners with terms borrowed from the underworld of heterosexual prostitution, and misleadingly use terms such as "He-Strumpets" and "He-Whores" even for quite ordinary gay men who would never think of soliciting payment for their pleasures. But the records of trials suggest that the mollies engaged in sex for pleasure rather than profit. (n.p.)

Rictor's history of Molly Houses shows how tropes of one subclass were transposed onto another. In this formulation, Millwood's prostitution is a figurative embodiment of homoerotic activity in the prevalent moralistic code of the era, which conflated such confused terms as buggery with whoring. *The London Merchant*, however, works to disassociate this connection by extolling homoerotic desires and relations while surreptitiously degrading capitalist endeavors, even of the licit sort.

The passionate prison scene between Barnwell and Trueman is contrasted with Barnwell's cold response to Maria's declaration of overtly romantic love for him directly afterward. It is, in fact, Trueman who first imparts Maria's love to Barnwell before she enters the scene by declaring, "Whatever you and I have felt and more, if more be possible, she feels for you" (74). The delectably flagrant innuendo—or, a rather "flaming" *flagrante delicto*—questioning whether "more be possible" is a flag that Barnwell and Trueman have now been

symbolically both married and murdered by each other, the comic and tragic amalgamation disrupting legible categories of interpretation. Barnwell then responds, "I know he doth abhor a lie," a word that is repeated by Maria when she says "this dreadful catastrophe virtue herself abhors" and that Barnwell again uses when he tells Maria, "Oh, say not so, but fly, abhor, and leave me to my fate!" (74-75). The insistence on the word "abhor," which also means to "be at variance, be inconsistent, differ entirely from" (OED) and has a strong echo of "whore," implicates Maria as something less than purely virtuous.

Just as one may hear *Born*-well corrupted by the orphan Barnwell's name, suggesting a misplaced aristocrat at the same time it consigns that aristocracy to the sty, Maria's name indicates she embodies both the virginal Mary and Mary Magdalene, her profligate double. This counter-reading of Maria is confirmed by Trueman when he points out in an aside, "She pants as in the agonies of death," (77) with its strong sexual flavor, as panting is nearly animalistic. Barnwell never tells Maria that he loves her in return, only offering her a markedly "chaste embrace" (77). Hence the play pointedly contrasts the homoerotic innuendo traded between the two apprentices with the chaste, almost insipid dialogue between Barnwell and Maria directly afterward.

Maria's rhetoric is inverted, opposing Barnwell and Trueman's "murderous" desires with the claim that Barnwell is "the first, last object of her love, for whom alone she'd live—for whom she'd die a thousand, thousand deaths if it were possible—expiring in her arms." (76). Whereas Barnwell and Trueman hope to kill for their love, Maria wishes to die or *be* murdered; whereas Trueman and Barnwell embrace their bracing and bellicose arms, Maria would "expire" in another's. Of course, it is not possible for Maria to get her wish, just as it is not possible for Trueman and Barnwell's love to be surpassed (or, for that matter, suppressed). Given the

overtones of libertine discourse beneath the sentimental overtures in this scene, Barnwell's comment to Maria, "Bless with your charms some honorable lord… and by your example improve… the English court" (75) may have latent satiric import. What Barnwell deems "honorable" lords could also be viewed as aristocratic rakes, especially given that such comparisons were commonplace, and so Maria's languishing to take a lover may put her in the role of a woman of easy virtue.

Maria's equivocal nature is underscored when she conceals Barnwell's embezzling. She declares she would "purchase so great a happiness" as Barnwell's reputation at a "much dearer price," and then says, "to Heaven and you, the judges of this action, I appeal whether I have done anything misbecoming of my sex and character" (44). Though ostensibly the question is directed to Trueman since it is not marked as an aside, her question addressed to the plural "judges" underscores that she is imploring the audience. By emphasizing that she is "purchasing" Barnwell's freedom—and her own happiness in the process—Maria ironically turns into one purchasing her pleasure: what the "much dearer price" is, because unspecified, seems calculatedly provocative. Furthermore, by acknowledging that a reputation can be purchased at all she is essentially buying into the system in which the *appearance* of purity can be retailed at a price. By excusing Barnwell's outright theft as an "unhappy mismanagement," she strikes a note of specious casuistry, and when she says, "A virgin's fame is sullied by suspicion's slightest breath; and, therefore… this must be a secret from my father and the world" (44), she induces a suspicion even in the act of quieting it though her whispered words. Finally, there's the damning question of where Maria obtained such a large amount of ready-money? Given such insinuations, the audience is quite charitable if it thinks that Maria's pecuniary designs to cover up Barnwell's "mismanagement" are impeccably generous. Maria's secret transfer of funds not only threatens

to undo her status as the innocent ingénue by insinuating that her deft handling of money betrays a possible sexual knowingness, it links her to Millwood as a figure of prostitution since they both attempt to gain their desires through illicit pecuniary means.

Maria's dilemma underscores that the idea of women being property is more than simply a literary metaphor—in the eighteenth-century it was a legal fiction, and the play demonstrates that through the culture of footloose tramping and underhanded trumping (and its parallel with the marriage market), the exchange works in both directions so that any loose change can be translated into loose women, or vice versa. In this context, the figures of Thorowgood and Millwood, seemingly contrasted as ethereally good and evil incarnate, are alike the mercantile doppelgängers of the play's title, both London merchants who are equally betrayed by their pseudo-familial gangs. Although David Mazella writes that "the desertion of Millwood by her servants is one of the early and explicit signals to the audience to reject her and her example" (798), the audience should recognize long before Lucy and Blunt do that Millwood is a nefarious character; moreover, if Mazella's claim has any force, then we should also suspect Thorowgood, given Barnwell's earlier betrayal of him. Just as the rhyme between their names links Millwood to Thorowgood, Thorowgood himself splits the difference between embodying Christian goodness and commercial goods. While Millwood can be likened to a pulpy femme fatale, foreshadowing Barnwell's literal downfall when she "hung on his neck and wept" (45), she also takes on masculine and satanic aspects, as well, especially in her unrepentant exchange with Trueman in which he says, "To call thee woman were to wrong the sex, thou devil" (64). She rebukes Trueman by noting that "Riches, no matter by what means obtained, I saw secured the worst of men" (64), which echoes Trueman's apothegm earlier in the play that "few men recover reputation lost; a merchant, never," (43) which effectively feminizes merchants since it makes a

merchant's reputation—or "credit"—as precarious as a women's reputation is to the imprecations of scandal. Thus, by the play's own terms, Thorowgood's masculinity is confused as well, and his purity may be a pose, suspicions Millwood raises by addressing him as "a gentleman of your appearance," emphasizing his potential artifice and concealment (62). Notwithstanding that the plot clearly subjects Millwood to a disgraceful death, there are signs that the play nevertheless ironically champions her, despite her loose lips or because of them, as a teller of truth since, being already shamed, she has little reason to sham.

The play begins, in fact, with Thorowgood's admonition to Trueman that, "the name of merchant never degrades the gentleman… take heed not to purchase the character of complaisant at the expense of your sincerity" (11) wherein Thorowgood must take explicit pains to articulate the merchant's word as equivalent with a gentleman's honor. In his opening speech he also equates the "honest merchants" with patriots who contribute to "their country" (11). However, these professions are soon equivocated when Thorowgood praises Elizabeth for having Walsingham, her Secretary of State, negotiate with the Genoese to "break their contract" (11). He says "the state and bank of Genoa… rightly judged of their true interest," subtly merging state and bank, as well as using a pun on "interest" that continues throughout the play. To argue for any entity to "break their contract," on the basis of "interest" gainsays his all-too-eloquent rhetoric of sincerity, a fact underscored, as McBurney mentions in a footnote, by there being "apparently no historical basis" for the incident (11). Likely, Lillo contrived the tale as a believable (yet, like Thorowgood himself, ultimately false) foil to the merchant's oratorical opening gambit of honesty.

Peter Hynes states that "Thorowgood's ethos is an ethos of contract" (681). Hynes goes on to argue that "Lillo's universe… is organized along well-recognized, orthodox lines that

demarcate a favoured regime of free contracts and commercial exchange and a repellant underworld of pure domination" (683). But if Thorowgood's initial encomium on merchants insidiously praises the *breaking* of a contract for the sake of nationalistic opportunism, then the dichotomy between supposedly free contracts opposed to the outlaw's dishonest domination is already subtly compromised. At several key points, instead, the play demonstrates that the contract system is not free since both parties have uneven legal, financial, and moral standing.

Hynes remarks that "part of the reason for Thorowgood's failure to stop Barnwell's fall, the play implies, is that he perversely refused a contract, an exchange of Barnwell's confession for his mercy" (698). By preemptively forgiving Barnwell, Thorowgood effectively silences him, preventing him from owning up to—and potentially rectifying—his crimes, thereby demonstrating that the master-apprentice relationship, though based on a formal contract, relies upon implicit coercion and asymmetrical power dynamics. Hynes also points out that Maria's "cover up for her beloved [is]… an instance of charitable cheating" (689). Furthermore, Hynes states that Maria's declaration of her love in the culminating prison scene only occurs "at the moment when even the shadow of a contract, of a worldly exchange becomes out of the question," leaving her "free to donate her love" (689). If she had any hope that her desires could be fulfilled, then declaring them so frankly would taint her maidenly honor: she would seem to be baiting her suitor with an alluring but potentially false promise, angling for a marriage proposal.

Hynes interprets these problematic episodes as evidence that generosity is a "noble" sentiment, and as such derives from aristocratic rather than mercantile values—Thorowgood's and Maria's failures result from not abiding by a strict contractual exchange; had they done so, it is likely Barnwell's fate may have ended happily (687-690). If Hynes is correct, then his

argument points out the fault lines exposed in the play as it tries to merge ideologies of Christian charity and mercantile capitalism, an uneasy rupture. In fact, a basic, though often overlooked, irony of *The London Merchant* is that its conflict involves Barnwell being the servant of two masters, an allusion perhaps not so much to Goldoni's comedy, but to the Biblical parable (*KJV*, Matthew 6:24), which makes its moral explicit: one cannot serve both God and money. Yet, many commentators are apt to see Thorowgood as the mouthpiece of both mercantile expansion and Christian piety.

Nonetheless, these violations of contractual ethos can be read as part of a larger pattern. Maria's disregard of contracts also demonstrates the imbalance and collusion inherent in systems where the parties are not entirely free to give or withhold their consent. Whereas Maria's secret charity shows that those who control the ledger can often make it tally in their favor, her reticence in declaring her love results from the uneven distribution of power between the sexes, a system against which Millwood's fulminations likewise inveigh. Millwood's critique, after all, is that women and men—much like apprentices and masters—hold disproportionate hierarchical positions under a capitalist regime, which compromises their free agency when entering into nominally consensual contracts, and thus in such circumstances exchange and trade underwrites exploitation in the name of so-called "freedom" and "moral responsibility." Millwood and Barnwell alike are expendable in such a system, symbolically positioned as slaves with little real freedom as economic agents, as they are both cut off by the powers that govern the social structure when they disrupt it.

IV. Credit Where Credit is Due: Last Words and First Impressions

The dominant critical impression of *The London Merchant* as a Puritanical morality play with clear didactic lines drawn between good and evil is contravened especially by the ending, in which Millwood appears to get the last word. The ending, in which the fates of Barnwell and Millwood are seemingly contrasted, however, reveals that this ostensible tragedy, as Lincoln B. Faller notes, "comes ultimately to a comic resolution" (112). Despite the fact that both Barnwell and Millwood are condemned to die for their crimes, the import of their deaths could hardly be more different. Barnwell is transformed into a hero and martyr, publically repenting his sins, pitied not only by the small social circle of characters in the play, but presumably by the audience for whom those characters model a sentimental reaction. Barnwell's parting speech addresses Trueman and Maria as explicit surrogates for the spectators, divided into gendered norms of response:

> If any youth, like you, in future times
> Shall mourn my fate, though he abhors my crimes,
> Or tender maid, like you, my tale shall hear
> And to my sorrows give a pitying tear… (78)

Indeed, eighteenth-century audiences of both sexes are reported as weeping for Barnwell—in spite of his consorting with a whore, stealing from his mentor, and uncle-murdering that place his behavior on par with the worst libertines and highwaymen. Conversely, the audience likely had a sadistic pleasure in knowing Millwood would be punished. "Millwood," as David Mazella writes, "consistently places herself outside the bounds of the moral community that has formed

around Barnwell" (789). Barnwell offers himself as a noble sacrifice whereas Millwood acts as the ignoble scapegoat for this community.

Barnwell, in fact, is not only reincorporated into the moral community by his death, but into the economic community of exchange that goes with it. He tells Thorowgood that "my offenses, though great, are not unpardonable and that 'tis not my interest only but my duty to believe and to rejoice in that hope. So shall Heaven receive the glory, and future penitents the profit of my example" (69). Barnwell is not execrated as a sinner; rather, he is exculpated—even glorified—as a prodigal returning to the fold. His "example," in this instance, is one to be *emulated* in so far as he is the paragon of a repenting sinner. The gravity of his sins acts to emphasize the boundless mercy provided not only by heaven but by his circle of friends and the audience themselves. Thus, the waste generated by his criminal and sinful activity (spilled seed, embezzled funds, a murdered laborer, and the cost of his own punishment) becomes recuperated as "profit" through his use in a moralizing spectacle. In this way, Barnwell, unlike Millwood, stands as the heroic exemplar of mercantile capitalism, whose theological conversion is simultaneously a conversion of squandered goods into a type of surplus value for the wages of sin, which produces more wealth as its spectacle is circulated.

Barnwell's "example" is nonetheless equivocal: earlier he addresses the audience, saying, "By my example learn to shun my fate / …Here purchase wisdom cheaply at my cost" (59). The lesson here is not to repent one's sins, but to avoid repeating the wasteful mismanagement of one's resources like George Barnwell. The logic, however, is somewhat similar—the spectacle provided by Barnwell enforces discipline, which benefits the workers themselves because they can "purchase" this discipline on the cheap. Yet, despite saying "at my cost," Barnwell does not ultimately lose out in this transaction. Because he later becomes one of the saved, religiously as

well as economically, he begins to "taste of pleasure more than mortal" (71). What appears as loss on a worldly level is compensated by abounding grace, and he is no longer found wanting in the balance of the divine account book. And, as long as other apprentices are disciplined through his example, the worldly account books are squared, as well.

Such a reckoning, as Lincoln B. Faller recognizes, helps to superimpose the heroic drama onto Lillo's middle-class characters since Barnwell, like many protagonists in heroic drama:

> is torn between the attractions of love and his dedication to duty, and [likewise] George is undone by his sentimental nature… compromised by his redemption at the end of the play, and by the assurance offered both him and the audience that he is destined for heaven—his soul is saved, what though his body perish? (107)

The code of the merchant, as put forward by Thorowgood, has been exalted into a substitute for the chivalric code of honor, one which brings glory to the nation; Barnwell's countervailing impulse toward "love," on the contrary, reveals itself as degraded, nothing higher than deception or tawdry lust, which only George's innocence and astounding naïveté can mistake for a nobler passion. Barnwell's worldly desires become expunged in the play, as even the chaste merchant's trade transforms (or is replaced by) an evangelical work of winning souls, which knows no scarcity given the infinitude of God's forgiveness. Thorowgood rejoices that Barnwell has become one "who only counts for wealth the souls he wins" and if he turns one convert considers his "labors overpaid" (70). The mercantile conception of honor and credit is implicitly aligned at the beginning of the play with a chivalric sense of honor and aristocratic national duty, but then, as the play progresses, those now-elevated mercantile terms—wealth, profit, labor, accounting,

and so forth—become rendered as simply metaphors for a different system again, cashed out and exchanged for an allegory of Christian redemption. The play cleverly negotiates these shifting sets of values for its sentimental effect. The low apprentice figures are held up to an aristocratic-like standard: "For Trueman (and of course Barnwell too)," Faller writes, "living up to Thorowgood's mercantile ethic is the way to achieve superior worth as a man" (106). Thorowgood's masculine identity relies on both ethics, though the play reveals how these ethics are often incompatible and corrupt.

If Thorowgood is, through both his moral authority and social standing in the play, equivalent to a sovereign prince, then Barnwell appears in line to marry his daughter and inherit the little realm that Thorowgood controls. Jones DeRitter observes that this fits into a common "paradigm of the young man who succeeds by marrying the princess and inheriting the kingdom" (383). Failing to meet the expectations of the aristocratic-cum-mercantile ethic, however, creates the space in which Barnwell may have a tragic fall, despite—at the outset—his being a comically low character type. But any real tragedy is averted, despite both the reprehensible actions he has committed and the fatal storyline, as the play shifts again to redeem Barnwell in terms of a spectacle of discipline and Christian salvation. Paradoxically, the events of the plot show Barnwell as a low mechanic who falls even lower into the blackest gulfs of despond, yet, by the careful control of point of view and the implicit values depicted through the more sympathetic characters, Barnwell is nevertheless raised, at first, into a potential suitor in a quasi-courtly society, and then, elevated even higher into near saintly beatitude. The course of errors between Barnwell's perfect innocence and his complete redemption, which composes the action of the drama, have been effaced: the audience need not feel any compunction for shedding tears over this lowlife cheat and murderer, as they readily displace shame and blame upon Millwood.

Considering the onus of low class and high crimes that attend Barnwell, it is surprising that Lillo turns him into such a sympathetic figure for his respectable eighteenth-century audiences.

Gail K. Hart observes that Millwood's critique of the asymmetry of gender relations perpetuated under capitalism and her "eloquent and subtle analysis of the gender hierarchy does not fit into the main action of the play…. Millwood and her pronouncements are, in the end, left hanging" (35-36). No one is roped into answering her attacks even while she herself points to her suffering and eventual death as more evidence to condemn economic and gender disparities. The result, Hart argues, is that *The London Merchant*, "offers a lesson in scapegoating" (36) since "in as much as it teaches its audience to ignore Millwood's dissenting voice, one could say that it silences the dissenter by allowing her to speak" (32). If one's sympathy for Barnwell depends on scapegoating Millwood, then her status as a victim of the larger injustices of capitalist exploitation and patriarchal domination must go unheeded. Millwood is allowed to voice such a complex and contrarian viewpoint precisely because, in Hart's view, the structure of the play guarantees that her voice will not be heard. The audience is trained not so much how to avoid the fate of George Barnwell—no didactic lesson is needed there since his folly is evident to everyone but himself—but rather how to accede without question to capitalist and misogynist ideologies even in the face of the articulation of reasons that condemn them.

Though for many in the eighteenth-century audience, Millwood may have acted as the scapegoat, "to modern audiences," David Wallace writes, "Millwood is Lillo's most interesting character" (135). Indeed, "twentieth-century readers," David Mazella concurs, "have inverted the traditional moral hierarchy and regarded Millwood's crimes as a form of ethical heroism" (798). Though the play does much to cast Millwood as the villain, a reevaluation of her role as victim and even hero is not simply, however, a result of applying extrinsic contemporary values to this

otherwise pious eighteenth-century drama; the play itself offers a countervailing frame by which to regard Millwood since "the difference between Millwood and Thorowgood," as Wallace notes, "is not merely moral but also revolves around opposing interpretations of modern capitalism" (137). If Millwood is not answered, perhaps it is because there *are* no good answers to the dilemmas she poses. After all, the climactic dialogue between Millwood and Thorowgood ends with Thorowgood turning, in what seems an aside to the audience, and acknowledging that Millwood's argument is right: "Truth is truth, though spoken from an enemy and spoke in malice. You bloody, blind, and superstitious bigots, how will you answer this?" (66). If the spectators at this point—blindly, one might say— still see Thorowgood as the play's moral exemplar, his turning on them in a direct address would have a disconcerting significance; the "blood" for the crimes enacted in the play is now on their hands. Millwood is then allowed the last word, in a lengthy monologue in which she claims, "The judge who condemns a poor man for being a thief had been a thief himself, had he been poor. Thus, you go on deceiving and being deceived, harassing, plaguing, and destroying one another, but women are your universal prey" (66). The men in the audience are singled out and blamed for their hypocrisy, greed, and unfairness to women. Far from allowing Millwood's critique to be glossed over or ignored, Thorowgood agrees with it, pointing a finger at the spectators: the audience itself is emphatically condemned for its implicit condemnation of Millwood.

Such a condemnation suggests the play has a critical animus, but towards what exactly? The charges leveled at the audience are rather grandiose and all-encompassing. Lee Morrissey writes that "Barnwell's conflicting desires represent the limits of rational choice, or of understanding 'need'… It is not so much that Barnwell does not know or cannot decide what he wants; it is in a sense that he is forced to make a choice" (33). The finger is pointed, Morrissey

hints, at Barnwell's never-ending superfluity of desires to consume, both sexually and economically, which eventually consumes him: the necessity of the agent to choose in the marketplace turns back upon the source of agency, inscribing it into compulsory legible forms and binary terms such as masculine or feminine, gay or straight, knowing or naïve, generous or greedy, and even good or bad. Morrissey, though, does not choose. "Ultimately, however, I hesitate to decide," she declares, "whether the play uses consumer culture to figure sexuality, or sexuality to represent consumer culture" since the play is about both the "gendering of commerce" *and* the "commercialization of sexuality" (36). Apprenticeship may be likened to prostitution because each is a form of selling the self, a self that is increasingly conscripted into categories of identity so as to be fungible as capital. Millwood and Barnwell attempt to escape the classificatory scheme assigned to them, which proves fatal.

The London Merchant shows how desire is historical, created by the economic and social conditions that valorize certain objects and affects over others, and, by doing so, concomitantly enforces the legibility of the consumer's identity in turn. Lee Edelman notes that sodomy is often figured in the eighteenth century as not only a violation of a gentleman's somatic integrity—the property of his own body—but also as "a crisis in, or perversion of, the process of signification itself" (124). Sodomy is an unspeakable act, which disrupts the notion of not only what goes in, but what comes out, of mouths and other orifices. Similarly, a woman's chastity was deemed her "honesty," such that a woman who was not "honest" might be capable of any number of cunning slurs or crafty spells, presenting the dangerous example that could undo the grounds of reference itself. The queerness, or cipher-like quality of the characters that have refused their assigned social roles, inhabiting displaced relations, contributes to the queering of the generic legibility of

the play they occupy, as well, since character types are a constitutive aspect of genre construction.

If *The London Merchant* trades on its generic ambivalence, my argument that one of those genres is libertine comedy does nothing to discount critical and stage traditions of sentimental, bourgeois, melodramatic, or pious interpretations of the play. My point is that through a comparison of the drama's characters to comedic Restoration rakes and aristocratic strumpets, and an awareness of homoerotic subtexts, the play's multifarious properties can be made more apparent. The unsettling nature of the play is due, in large part, to its grafting of libertine comedy onto other, more tragic or earnest genres. The values represented by the drama, however, are not fixed, but rather to be negotiated in the marketplace: audiences and readers are free to prize one facet of the play over another as historical conditions and fashions of hermeneutics or performance change. Nevertheless, a specter is haunting the play—the specter of self-parody. The contestation of wholesale differences within the text, and it various subtexts, renders what's between the lines as the play's *bottom* line. That is, a suspicion of internal disseverance overhangs the drama, a disquieting sense of discord that trips up its sure-footed didactic intent, and which may turn its didactic force against those who think they wield its authority. However precious its sentiments or piety or middle-class aspirations, the play's profligate undertones reveal a countervailing impulse beneath its decorum of apologetic. In place of a clear moral lesson for *or* against capitalism, traditional gender roles, and hetero-normative sexual relations, we are offered instead a drama that superimposes, and at times thereby uncovers, points of contradiction in those social constructs within an emerging capitalist worldview.

Chapter Four

Affect and Affectation: Economies of Performance in Sentimental Novels

Ann Wierda Rowland notes that "as late as 1799, *Barclay's Dictionary* hesitates at the task" of defining the word "sentimental," claiming that it is:

> a word lately introduced into common use, but without any precise meaning. Those who use it appear to understand by it, that affecting turn of thought which is peculiar to works of fancy, or where there is a display of the pathetic as in the grave scenes of comedy, or of novels. (193)

Despite the dismissive tone of this definition, it succinctly captures many of the contradictions, ambiguities, and imprecisions inherent in sentimental discourse. Sentiments are not matters of fact, which can be isolated in empirical reality, but affects—or interpersonal structures of feeling—applied to various objects and circumstances, and so liable to be dismissed as a projection or phantasm of readers' overactive fancy by those with other points of view, as this lexicographer's snarkiness attests. Sentimental episodes at once present an emotional clairvoyance and the grounds for misunderstandings. They occur most often at odd generic junctures, such as the grave scenes in comedy, where competing or overlapping norms of response constrain the representation of action, or in novels where the very newness of the form in the eighteenth century, or a novel's departures from established conventions, results in an instability in how to read certain situations. Such uncertainty surrounding sentiment produces a need for its continual display, a performance, which, once it is rehearsed and iterated, threatens

to make affects into affectations, and thus render sentiment into an empty word or, perhaps worse, sentimentality. Yet, for all these doubts surrounding its very existence, the sentimental is a mode of coupling heart and head, body and mind: a turn of thought with both an affective and a material valence, given its performative registrations. Nevertheless, a sentiment is also a "turn" that may veer into satire when the mechanisms by which sentiment stages its sympathetic regard becomes emphasized instead of its emotional immediacy.

Sentimental novels often employ the figures such as sighs, trembling, and tears. Such figures threaten to turn the body into gaseous matter, vibratory strings, or a liquescent residue. Tears, for example, enact a watery coagulation between characters in the work as well as the characters and their sympathetic readers, blurring strict boundaries of identity. In fact, the tears that the text represents may induce the reader's real tears, thereby further eroding the distinction between readers and characters, as well as reference, reality, and textuality. One could imagine the reader's tears falling on the page and smudging the ink to illegibility. Such an effect of indiscrimination can increase the circumference of those the reader considers a member of an in-group and those marked by alterity. Thus sentimental novels often have been used to build acceptance and sympathy for classes or subgroups that have been previously stigmatized and marginalized as exogamous. Many sentimental novels build readers' sympathy not only for their fictional heroes and heroines, but for women, the middle-class, the poor, slaves, and other marginalized groups, re-evaluating the status of these groups through a sympathetic protagonist so that readers, who may not align with such a group otherwise, feel themselves connected to the plight of the abject, and thereby recognize the injustices within the social order. *Clarrisa*, for example, allows the male reader to inhabit the interior crisis of its eponymous heroine: the reader

is led to identify with her despite potential differences of class and gender, and, through that imaginative identification, generate sympathy for the situation of women more generally.

Satire, by contrast, is typically thought to work by ostracizing and ridiculing characters, condemning hypocrisy or other forms of duplicity. It polices a social line, discriminating, for instance, between the good doctor and the quack or the honest merchant and the shyster. The reader's values are often assumed to align with the implied authorial voice of the satirist, so that the laugh which satire registers is an aggressive act of shaming behavior, which banishes immoral poseurs from contaminating the order of the community that both the reader and the implied author share. For this reason, characters that are the objects of satiric attack are often rendered in exaggerated, grossly distorted terms, the features of their liminal "passing" (both physical and behavioral) blown-up to extremes that frequently verge on bestial or mechanistic caricature—so that their actions, deemed dangerously antisocial and self-interested, can be legible (often on the characters' bodies), read as entirely "other," and phantasmatically distanced from the reader. *The Dunciad*, for example, might be thought to distinguish the work of hack Grub Street scribblers from the exulted labors of the Scriblerians, thereby insinuating that the reader should condemn dull pretenders to muddy oblivion, while allying with the poetic good sense of Pope and his fellows, whom the (well-bred, implicitly male) reader's very act of reading proves triumphant.

But even as my paradigmatic examples might indicate, the energies that make for a sentimental tear-jerker as well as an excoriating satire have the potential to spill over into their contraries. Some readers may identify more with the dynamic struggles of the libertine Lovelace than with Miss Harlowe, especially as Richardson goes beyond lifting Clarissa to a level with the reader and makes her over into a martyred saint whose unblemished innocence surpasses the

mixed condition of most mere mortals. The reader's potential identification with Lovelace complicates the narrative and may, in fact, lead to greater moral nuance and possible self-recognition. If Richardson was of the devil's party and did not know it, though, it gives his text an ironic complexity that its moralistic suasions belie. Likewise, as many have observed, Pope, in giddily describing the poetasters who sport after false laurels down murky slop-holes, cannot help getting a bit bespattered himself, partaking in the ribald contests he portrays, polluted by his own representation of the bad writing he would seem to condemn. That is, the very act of describing—and, to some degree, imitating—his rival poetasters causes his own verses to be contaminated so that Pope's text indulges in the very bathos and billingsgate it supposedly repudiates. Many readers are more inclined to appreciate the naughtier and nastier Pope who mucks around with the hacks than the all-too-snooty spokesperson for official taste. Again, incorporating these low elements—rather than cordoning them off—lends vitality and tension to Pope's work, which prevents it from having an empty elegance.

Frederic V. Bogel argues, in fact, that satire inherently functions from a compromised position, a double structure wherein there is "a play of satiric rhetoric between identification and division" (68). In Bogel's view, only those figures a satirist deems too close for comfort require the demarcation that the satirist draws between self and other; yet, importantly, the satirist's identification with, or mimicry of, the butt of his or her attack is required along with the satiric casting out, and the marks of otherness that the satirist achieves is not a revelation of a prior difference, but rather the *creation* of that difference itself. Furthermore, not all satires position the reader to accept passively the implied author's satiric judgments—some may ironize that authorial judgment, endorse another view through framing devices, consciously thematize the doubleness and ambiguity of the satirist's position, or even ask the reader to question the norms

by which any satiric judgments operate. While I agree with Bogel that the most interesting and complex satire often has this double (or polyvalent) structure, I am less inclined to view it as essential to satire as such: the imitation enacted in performing the satiric butts within a text does not *necessarily* bleed over into mistaking that performance as the identity of the implied or real author, the reader, or of whatever self is performed through satire; however, Bogel's examples demonstrate that the most compelling cases of satire nevertheless often can and do implicate their readers and authors with the very types that the text ostensibly exiles. The most interesting satires not only create differences but sometimes simultaneously undo such differences, as well.

Bogel's analysis can prove especially instructive in regards not to texts normally considered satiric, but rather to sentimental fiction by hinting that a corollary double structure potentially lurks in the sentimental mode. The implied author of a sentimental text frequently *creates* sameness or similitude in order for a reader to identify with a character, a character (at least initially) who is often regarded as different or other. Author, reader, and character positions may be aligned and even blurred in the sentimental mode—though, as in Bogel's view of satire, the reader does not have to compliantly accept this positioning: the text may question or challenge the very melting or merging of identities that it creates. Where satire often makes difference, sentimental fiction frequently attempts to efface it. Indeed, these potential double structures of both satire and sentimental texts may operate as mirror images of each other, and thus in some cases can effectively collapse to a single dialectical framework. Specifically, the two double structures play off each other in a dialogic self-parody: the sentimental collapsing of identities ironically alienates the reader invested in the novel's satiric interpretation while the sincerity underwritten by the sentimental attachments the reader has formed to the characters becomes undone by the screening or policing effect of the satiric mode. The combination of

satiric and sentimental structures creates an allegory for reading both books and people that challenges the satirist's judgmental sophistication as well as the sentimentalist's principle of naturalized sympathy.

Despite the genre's putative tendency to depict affects as natural and immediate, many sentimental novels actually show the affects as denaturalized and theatricalized, a performance which may be manipulated to become fungible in terms of economic exchanges. Gillian Skinner writes that "sensibility, as a movement, as a discourse, took part in and partook of the very constructs and values it is conventionally supposed to have abhorred…. the languages of sensibility and economic theory, conventionally deemed to be separate and indeed antagonistic… overlap and coincide" (2). As a result, she argues, "eighteenth-century sentimental fiction incorporates and assimilates [newer economic vocabularies] in a variety of ways, so that whenever such texts deal with the financial, particularly where it is connected to feeling and with charity, there is a perhaps unexpected but nevertheless crucial conjunction of apparently inimical discourses"(10). In many cases, these seemingly inimical discourses of economics and sensibility raise the specter of satire in otherwise sentimental fictions: tears can be used to inveigle money, chastity exchanged for wealth, or sympathy quantified by charity.

Robert Markley, for example, avows that "money becomes the sentimentalist's medium of exchange, a palpable, materialist manifestation of good nature as a commodity" (210). Despite Markley's recognition that in *A Sentimental Journey* "Sterne seems both a propagandist for bourgeois good nature," an ideology that equates money and benevolence by deploying class privilege, "and its critic…. [because] Yorick seems both a virtuous innocent and naïve butt" (220-221), Markey nevertheless emphasizes Sterne as propagandist and Yorick as innocent, sometimes almost conflating the author with the character, mistaking the authorial pose for a

reality, while largely neglecting the critical, satiric, and comic aspects of the novel. Markley acknowledges "the reader's suspicions that [Yorick] is acting out of self-interest or hopes for sexual profit" (225) which potentially turn the novel into a comic satire *against* the naïve, bourgeois, sentimental equations of money and feeling that Yorick transacts. Yet Markley asserts that "the novelist cannot resolve the contradictory basis of sentimental ideology but only restage and restate them" (223). The fragmentary and dissolute novel, however, seems less bent on "resolving" such contradictions than restaging them on one level only as a means to pointing out their fissures and absurdities on another: largely, what makes the novel so funny is the discrepancy between Yorick's self-conception as a charitable man of feeling and some readers' ability to see past his mystifications. *A Sentimental Journey* is a journey to no definite end, or perhaps to an end which is fundamentally a "bottom." It flagrantly violates both borders and boundaries between persons (and countries), yet the narrative is regaled as if full of moral purpose and integrity.

Such a critique of sentimentalism is incipient in some of its earliest progenitors, including Hume and Fielding; yet, by emphasizing sentimental fiction's satiric undercurrents, I do not mean to underestimate the power of its affective moments. By the 1790s—as the quotation from Barclay's Dictionary attests—a backlash against sentimentalism arose, whether in the form of mocking young men who followed Werther's suicidal course or equating sentimentalist tendencies with Jacobin principles. By the time Austen writes *Sense and Sensibility*, for example, she partners the self-absorbed hypochondriac Marianne's emotional excess (an excess Marianne understands as corporeal, natural, and therefore ethical) with the highly performed excess of Willoughby's confused attempts at social climbing, as Austen portrays both sides of the sentimentalist coin in a negative light. The force of the satire *against* sentimental ideology

inscribed *within* sentimental fiction, which I attempt to delineate here, by contrast, depends on the reader's susceptibility to the emotional and intellectual appeals of its discourse. The satire loses its bite where the sentimental appeal itself is entirely insipid and unmoving. In *A Sentimental Journey*, for example, the satire will redound not only upon Yorick but upon the reader if the reader is sometimes tempted to perceive Yorick as the good-natured hero he represents himself to be. An on-going negotiation between evoking more immediate sentimental affects and a countervailing satiric distanciation at work in these texts ultimately enables their readers to reflexively reconsider their own moral and political self-conceptions.

Markman Ellis writes that the discussion of moral philosophy was divided in the eighteenth century between views that:

> systems of virtue were established in mankind by the spiritual authority of God, that ethical judgments are made by an intuitive, aesthetic moral sense, and that they are subject to an empirically observed and analytic reason. The discontinuities between these positions… represents of course a paradox. The archaeology of sensibility may be traced through later revisions of this paradox. (12)

The moral paradoxes inherent in sentimentalism allows its polyvalent discourse the requisite flexibility to help provide a reformation, as Ellis states following Paul Langford, of "the code of genteel conduct necessary for the middle class to purchase gentility" (17). Yet, Ellis demonstrates that sentimental fiction is not only a middle-class expedient to justify its increased social prominence, but also politically efficacious in such causes as the emergent anti-slavery rhetoric, valorizing or depredating types of commercial exchange, reforming regulations and

attitudes about sex workers, and the creation of philanthropic organizations. Nevertheless, many sentimental novels, while exciting their readers' emotions for tacit political goals, nonetheless may also expose and explore the contradictions of sentimental concepts at their heart.

For many readers of sentimental novels, Ann Jessie Van Sant writes, "sensibility narratives are principally intended to produce effects, effects that occur in the nervous and circulatory system," (117) such as palpitating heartbeats, a flush of blood to the cheeks, a gush of tears, or the tingling of vibratory nerves. Much sentimental fiction is written not only to the moment, but to the body, as if the corpus of the text could directly affect the material subject, engaging an instant transfer of meaning wherein the reader experiences corporeal disturbances. Van Sant writes that "when plot is significant in a sensibility narrative, as it is in Gothic fiction, it becomes parodic because subordinated to producing sensations" (118). When sentimental novels are forced to foreground plot, which occurs most conspicuously at their endings, they become not just parodic, but self-parodic: the requirements of the romance genre inscribed within sentimental narratives turns their characters' picaresque rambles, desultory vagabondage, or temporary excursions into a teleological arc. The cumulative result of the various sensations experienced—by character and reader alike—throughout the novel must be literally cashed out. The ending points the narrative toward some ultimate economic and ethical conclusion, and the characters' abeyance between classes or moral points of view gestures toward a more determinate status. Yet, in the sentimental novels I examine here, the endings in particular are frequently their most controversial or misunderstood locus of critical concern; the endings of these novels, I argue, resist or send up the very conclusions they seem to imply. While the different destinies of Pamela and Clarrisa might be thought significant, both heroines are

supposed to represent moral exemplars of feminine virtue, and, in this sense, character is *not* fate since their fates diverge so widely.

The sentimental novels I examine—playing off this Richardsonian legacy—are at variance with conclusions that either naïvely grant rewards for virtue or result in tragic hagiography. These novels nevertheless satisfy the generic protocols of class ascension that often goes hand-in-hand with romance; but, in doing so, they call attention to their own artifice and thereby challenge many of the fundamental assumptions of the middle-class, sentimental ideology they appear to exemplify. Indeed, these novels upset the binary of satiric "othering" and sentimental identification not only by showing it as a complex continuum but also by introducing a third viewpoint that conceives human nature as a performance in a marketplace of social role players. Whereas both satire and sentiment function by relying on a surface/depth distinction, the dramatic notions that began emerging at this time conceptualized acting as a thoroughgoing *exteriorization* of character, which belies the contemporaneous development of interiority in novelistic traditions. Such a concept viewed the human comedy as a masquerade wherein simulation replaced intrinsic personality: people are actors in socially constructed yet variable contexts. While this concept of an intersecting flux of role-playing aligned with a culture that restructured to accord with an all-pervasive capitalist ideology, it often left the actors themselves with an experience that felt radically uncertain.

Sentiment as Bias and Norm: Hume's "On Moral Prejudice"

Hume's brief, often overlooked essay "On Moral Prejudice," from his second volume of *Essays, Moral and Political* (1742), an essay which he subsequently withdrew from publication,

shows Hume at his most fictional and novelistic. It is likely that Hume fabricated both the story of Eugenius and the "Letter from a Friend" (542) that makes up the bulk of the essay, as Eugene F. Miller, the editor, relates in a footnote. Indeed, Hume's essay reads like a sentimental novel in embryo, displaying that genre's characteristic themes and its stylistic tendency toward desultory fragmentation. In the essay Hume excoriates those who would deny sentiment either through stoic resignation or feigned displays of affect, and, by contrast, he offers a portrait of an exemplary sentimental hero. However, Hume then complicates this dichotomy by introducing the story of a rational, independent woman who engages a man of feeling to father her child through a contractual agreement. Hume uses ideas of sentiment to create a space between the domestic and public spheres. Ultimately, though, Hume's concept of such an idealized space of friendly truth-telling and social bonds depends on contradictory concepts of sentiment, and his fictional tales end on a note of puzzlement. The essay thus displays the tensions in a society regulated by older conceptions of affective norms and an emerging contractual market economy, demonstrating how diverse notions of sentiment could act to arbitrate or to divide such moral frameworks.

I. The Stoic's and the Skeptic's Threat to Sentiment

Hume begins by excoriating those who ridicule "every Thing, that has hitherto appear'd sacred and venerable" as well as those of a stoical persuasion who seek to overcome or eliminate "the most endearing Sentiments of the Heart, and all the most useful Byasses and Instincts, which can govern a human Creature" (538-539). The first group, he claims, disregard the "Bonds of Society," (538) thereby making earnest endeavors toward a greater public spirit and an orderly government impossible. The second group, he avers, disregard our inclination for forming

affective bonds, such as those that exists among family members, thereby uprooting the structures that hold society together.

More important, seemingly in Hume's judgment, than any philosophical reasoning—perhaps even than truth itself—is upholding the emotional connections and trust needed to form stable relationships for the greater benefit of society. Hume, in other words, is not arguing so much that the satirist and the stoic are wrong *per se*, but rather that the practical consequences of living by their claims would have disastrous effects. His ironic use of the term "Byasses" as well as his calling "the tender and virtuous Sentiments… Prejudices, if you will" (539) shows that, despite acknowledging sentimental perceptions as inherently subjective and likely skewed or unwarranted in their partiality, he nevertheless endorses them, since their evident utility mitigates any potential falsehood that such prejudices might encourage.

But it is not by pragmatic standards alone that Hume rebuts the satiric and stoic viewpoints since the greater danger to truth lies in following their insidious rhetoric, which would cause society to "degenerate into one universal System of Fraud and Corruption" (539). In the absence of such affective bonds and instinctive sympathy, Hume implies, individuals could no longer have good faith in transactions with their fellows, which would lead not only to mutual skepticism but also to an outright anarchy in which self-interest prevailed. Not heeding the sympathetic impulses could degenerate the world into a place of pickpockets and turncoats, counterfeits and purse-snatchers wherein the impetus for anyone to tell the truth would be nullified. Only cut-throats could prevail. In the absence of a forum for exchanging mutual sympathies, one would have no intimate circle, let alone access to a public discourse, free from the domination of opportunistic spin. Thus, for Hume, the bias of our affections ironically becomes the very basis for the possibility of any dialog that aims at the truth. Debate in the

public sphere requires everyone to profess sincere judgments; otherwise, philosophic argument deteriorates into the manipulative rhetoric of a sales-pitchers and confidence men. Even so-called disinterestedness depends on an assumption of a fundamentally sympathetic interest in others as moral agents who potentially share one's social and affective horizons.

Hume does not cite any specific satirists or scoffers that cry down the principles of "Reason, Sobriety, Honour, Friendship, Marriage… public Spirit, and even a Regard to our Country" (538), instead painting a generalized picture of a dissolute band of libertines and free-thinkers. He makes quick work to dismiss their arguments, which he considers self-defeating—little more than senseless carping. This in spite of the fact that Hume himself can be seen as a skeptic who casts doubt on such venerable common sense precepts as causation, the possibility of miracles, the primacy of reason over passions in moral action, and the fundamental reality of the self. But perhaps it is not so much their arguments as their attitude that provokes Hume's ire. After all, Hume's temperament was benign and modest, unlike the vague portrait of the self-righteous mockers he ridicules; he had an undogmatic distrust of his own skeptical conclusions. The essay, in transitioning from scoffers to stoics, claims "There is another Humour, which may be observ'd in some Pretenders to Wisdom, and which, if not so pernicious as the idle petulant Humour above-mention'd, must, however, have a very bad effect on those, who indulge it" (539). Hume co-opts the language of the humors, using the somewhat outmoded model of imbalanced bodily fluids to explain the emerging model of sympathetic response. In doing so, the essay operates less through philosophical arguments for or against unexamined sentimental attachments—notwithstanding my own attempts to schematically reconstruct those arguments—than it does through contrasting character types or temperaments; that is to say, Hume's essay

functions much like a sentimental novel, even though the concept of sentiment he uses operates at times under an older framework.

In discrediting the humor of the stoics, Hume singles out Epictetus's remarks that one may "counterfeit a Sympathy, if it gives [a friend] Relief, but take Care not to allow any Compassion to sink into your Heart, or disturb that Tranquility, which is the Perfection of Wisdom" (540). Hume may take umbrage about two things in Epictetus's statement. First, wisdom appears to be identified with *not* feeling, rather than a disposition toward happiness and compassion for one's fellow beings. Second, and perhaps posing an even greater challenge to Hume, Epictetus decouples the inward feeling from the outward affect. Teresa Brennan traces the genealogy of affects from pre-Modern demonological accounts that "visited the psyche, rather than originated within it" to more contemporary psychoanalytic accounts that still portray affects as moods in the air which are transmitted like "a bad smell" (97). Hume's use of affects plays between different conceptions. In one favored locution of the eighteenth century, which Hume uses with some frequency, affects are vibratory strings that can, in an acoustical metaphor, set off a corresponding vibration in other strings with a similar resonance. Hence, affects may bypass interpretive-level cognition, and can be conceptualized as more immediate somatic responses to an inter-personal phenomenological-somatic space largely distinct from the ontological level of rational-semantic discourse, though affects may nonetheless carry with them a freight of emotive "resonance," which in turn may have consequences for understanding an another's motives and significations.

However, in the case of Epictetus quoted above, affects can also be manipulated into behaving more like signs, though doing so requires the perceiver to continue registering them as an index for, or immediate somatic response to, another's emotional state. A friend—rather than

an actor—who counterfeits sympathy, though he or she utters no falsehoods, can be deceptive even if they are not telling a semantic-level lie. The reciprocal corporeal postures that are given and taken for registrations of feeling between the grief-stricken and the consoling friend are a system of signs for the stoic counterfeiter of consolation, having only a contingent and beguiling connection with the feelings they signify. Hume may fear this posturing without feeling will contaminate our most visceral, immediate, interpersonal emotional connections: if such counterfeiting becomes endemic, others' sentiments will no longer have any claim upon us. Instead, paranoia may develop in which everyone questions and endlessly reinterprets each other's affective responses and bodily comportments, eliminating the conditions of intimacy and immediacy of affective response that provide a somatic foundation in which truth-telling may occur. Today we still often seek a corporeal registration of sympathetic regard—whether insisting one looks us in the eye or through advanced polygraph analysis—as a guarantee for truthful communication.

Hume himself, though, does not comment at all on Epictetus's remark, letting its troubling implications resonate rather than trying to refute them. He moves on to a quote of Diogenes's, which he says shows that philosopher's "Liveliness and Ferocity of… Temper" (540). Hume, however, inverts the import of Diogenes's quote. Diogenes asks his friends to throw him to the beasts of the field when he dies, to which his friends object. Diogenes then says to place a cudgel by his corpse—when his friends respond that he would be insensible to use it, Diogenes quips, "*Then if the Beasts shou'd devour me… shall I be any more sensible of it?*" (540). Whereas Diogenes indicates his apparent indifference towards what happens to his remains at death, Hume implies that Diogenes is actually far from indifferent of his friend's misplaced concern since he wants to beat the insensibility out of them with the cudgel of his wit.

In other words, Diogenes's caustic tongue-lashings ironically exhibit him as having a lively sensibility, not a deadened and tranquilly stoic demeanor. The stoic seeks to annihilate emotions while the satirist would manipulate the affective display of emotions. Hume's point in recounting these anecdotes appears to be his familiar one that rational inquiry cannot—and should not—fundamentally alter or eradicate our passions. However, his implicit argument in this case operates by suggesting that rational dialogue itself would be impossible were it not for a shared and sincere correspondence between our inner emotions and their outward, corporeal disclosure.

II. A Sentimental Hero and an Anti-Sentimental Lady Philosophe

From this exposition of negative examples, Hume turns to inventing an imaginary sentimental hero, Eugenius, who will portray Hume's own preferred demeanor and approach to the good life, offering a contrast with the stoics and the scoffers. The young Eugenius, while devoting his life to philosophy, yet prefers "serving his Friends, or doing a Pleasure to some Man of Merit" (540). Eugenius thus represents the moral life of political action over the solitary, contemplative life; he is not a philosopher for philosophy's sake, but because it helps him recognize merit and know the good so that he can perform it. At thirty, Eugenius decides he should marry—not because he has any fondness for a particular woman, but out of consideration that he is the "last Branch of an antient Family" (541). Eugenius's attachment at this point is not to a beautiful lover, but to his family pride. Though this may strike many as cold, abstract, or potentially queer today, Hume evidently wishes to indicate that pride in one's family name can be a deeply felt and venerable sentiment. Yet, this excessive pride in family nomenclature and lineage is often sent-up in eighteenth-century novels: many, even during Hume's time, would possibly question Eugenius's motivations.

Nonetheless, after Eugenius fathers several children, his wife "paid at last the general Debt to Nature" (541). Because Eugenius only married to produce offspring, it seems convenient that once those offspring have been produced, his wife fortuitously dies, her purpose served (though, to be fair, it was a commonplace that women during this period died during childbirth). By regarding her death as a "debt," the story implies a naturalized economy, in which reproduction and mortality are kept in balance. Once the wife passes away, she serves another, and—in terms of the essay—a more poignant purpose: she allows Eugenius to express his sentiments of grief. He sheds copious tears for her, fondly remembers her birthday, keeps a miniature of her "next to his Bosom" (541), and wills that his body should be transported after death to lie next to hers in a monument inscribed with an epitaph he composes. Unlike Epictetus's counterfeiter, Eugenius's performance of grief is supposed to be authentic, an indulgence of tenderness beyond what most other philosophical accounts would think appropriate. And, contra Diogenes, Eugenius bemoans and memorializes his dead wife, despite her insensibility to his performances. Despite the seeming irrationality of Eugenius's various sentiments, which all seek to preserve some trace either of the dead wife or of his dead ancestors, keeping them "alive" through a hallucinatory sacrament or memorialized object, Hume implicitly affirms that Eugenius's actions are worthwhile.

Such sentiments connect Eugenius to the past and help perpetuate his memory into the future so that his life is diverted from a debilitating melancholia, through sympathy and ritual mourning. Eugenius believes we are connected to other human beings in a meaningful chain of feeling, even after we die. If he believed otherwise, his predicament would likely not only seem to cut him off from a moral community after his death, but he would also feel himself abandoned from his connection to others while still living. He might begin mourning his own death while he

still lived if he believed all his meaningful sentiments could not be somehow preserved or passed on. Freud notes, "In mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself" (246). The work of mourning that Eugenius performs helps tie him closer to others since he shares the burden of his feelings with his intimate circle of friends, recuperating bonds to a social nexus. Hume's focus on the temperament of philosophical viewpoints stresses their psychological efficacy: stoic and satiric humors lead to melancholia since, in recognizing human futility and the finality of death, they induce a pathologically depressive state of mind. How much healthier—if nonetheless irrational—is Eugenius, Hume claims. Though Hume admits some would "call it by the Name of *Weakness*" (541), Eugenius's tears and displays of tenderness allow him to endure the loss of his beloved relations, and actually connect him more strongly with his homosocial bonds; indeed, the wife's death acts as a catalyst for Eugenius's homosocial attachments to his friends.

Hume's story also emphasizes that the daughter, who as she grows up resembles Eugenius's dead wife, becomes Eugenius's favorite:

> One Daughter in particular is his Darling, and the secret Joy of his Soul; because her Features, her Air, her Voice recal every Moment the tender Memory of his Spouse, and fill his Eyes with Tears. He conceals this Partiality as much as possible; and none but his intimate Friends are acquainted with it. (541)

His wife lives again in the embodiment of the daughter, though, in looking upon her, Eugenius realizes that his wife is literally dead, as well. No matter how much the daughter may resemble the wife, she cannot replace the wife since Eugenius's relationship to his daughter is paternal

rather than sexual, however much his professed partiality may, especially for post-Freudian readers, hint of illicit, subconscious desires. His eyes, filled as they are with tears, fail to see clearly: instead of the daughter that is before him, he superimposes instead a memory of his deceased spouse. Eugenius indulges in an illusory projection. By confessing his preference to his friends, Eugenius is better able to form social bonds, which replace the ones he has lost, by displaying his sincere affects and trusting others to keep his secrets. Hume thereby demonstrates that Eugenius's illogical preference (or prejudice) for a particular daughter nonetheless results in helping him to cope with his wife's death and even permits him to draw his friends closer to him through revealing confidences, reaffirming new attachments to society in the face of those he has lost. Notably, the affective bonds created draw Eugenius closer to his male companions, not his dead wife, favorite daughter, or other family members; if anything, his projection estranges him from his family since he presumably cannot tell them the "secret joy of his soul." Perhaps Hume implies that Eugenius's attachments expand beyond the circumference of his family in this way, his sentiments expanding into a more generalized, non-familial sociability. Eugenius's apparently weak or sentimental reactions, in Hume's view, are actually robust customs of a strong ego that allow him to recover from the loss of his love-object. This shift also transposes Eugenius's sentimental attachments from the intimate and feminized domestic sphere of his family to a homosocial circle resembling—but not synonymous with—an "idealized" public sphere. The male friends must keep Eugenius's confidences, so the exchange is not public.

Hume's essay, nevertheless, goes on to juxtapose yet another case against the preceding ones, which disrupts the easy dichotomy he has so-far created between his sentimental hero, on the one hand, and the satiric and stoic mindsets, on the other. Hume claims to possess a letter from a friend, which he thinks will "serve as an Example, not to depart too far from the receiv'd

Maxims of Conduct and Behaviour, by a refin'd Search after Happiness or Perfection" (542). Hume is conservative in so far as he frames the story as showing the ridiculousness of overzealous philosophers who would depart from established customs, customs which he believes serve the purpose of regulating society while accommodating individual passions. But the puzzling and problematic nature of the story he goes on to tell does not directly bear out his conclusion, and instead casts doubt on some of the latent assumptions encoded in his portrait of Eugenius. His portrait of an independent, philosophical woman is admittedly ambiguous, and the friend ends the letter by claiming, "It is not yet known how the Parliament will determine in this extraordinary Case, which puzzles all the Lawyers, as much as it does the Philosophers" (544). Thus, despite Hume's confidant espousal of the moral of the letter at the outset, the letter itself, supposedly written by a friend but likely concocted by Hume himself, signs off by remarking that the story raises a conundrum, and the whole essay ends with the epistle's quandary.

The letter, written from Paris—a likely marker of its heroine's too-fashionable and erroneous tendencies—tells the story a woman of independent means who decides that she will not marry because she has observed "the many unhappy Marriages among her Acquaintance, and by hearing the Complaints, which her Female Friends made of the Tyranny, Inconstancy, Jealousy, or Indifference of their Husbands" (542). In her inclination against marrying, she resembles Eugenius. Unlike Eugenius, however, she does not have the motivation of continuing a patriarchal family name, and she bases her inclination on available evidence, demonstrating a rational rather than an emotive tendency. Even so, the woman desires to have a "Son, whose Education she was resolv'd to make the principle Concern of her Life, and by that means supply the Place of those other Passions, which she was resolv'd for ever to renounce" (542). This, too, is similar to Eugenius with regard to how he wants to marry only to create a progeny; and with

regard to how he replaces the passion he felt for his wife onto caring for his favorite daughter. Yet, the reversal of gender roles creates an uneven situation. While Eugenius is looked upon as a paragon for raising his children as a widower, the unwed mother's choice of raising her child alone is represented as morally fraught, an eccentricity of philosophic fervor against established custom.

The woman finds a man whom she hopes will meet her requirements at "the Play-house one Evening," (542-543) an apt location since it foregrounds their role-playing in this transaction. The man's roles are confined to being a sexual partner for the purposes of procreation and an intellectual friend. The woman is not represented as promiscuous since she "wou'd allow him no Freedoms; and amidst all her obliging Behaviour, confin'd and over-aw'd him to the Bounds of rational Discourse and Conversation" (543). Likewise, she does not deceive him about his role, once she judges that he is suitable for it, taking "a proper Opportunity of communicating to him her whole Intention" (543). The man, nonetheless, is found to be "too passionate a Lover to remain within the Bounds of Friendship" (543), so the woman sends him a "Bond of Annuity for a Thousand Crowns," cutting off their relationship (543-544). The circumstance is similar to a bachelor of birth and fortune who consorts with a "kept woman," though the gender roles in this case are again reversed. However, when a kept woman is the jilted lover, there is, especially at this time period, often blame placed upon her for entangling herself in the exchange and sacrificing her chastity for remunerative purposes. The lady philosophe, though, requires the man as little more than a sperm donor—there is no insinuation that she seeks him out for sexual pleasure. It is the man in this case who continues to seek sexual and affectionate pleasure from the woman. Conspicuously, there is no similar aspersion cast upon him for doing so. In Hume's story, the ardent man of feeling oversteps the bounds of the

contract, pressing the free-thinking woman to continue being his lover; the woman eventually attempts to pay him off in order to be left alone. What may provoke Hume is that there is an exchange of money for sentiment; in fact, the woman buys the man's *lack* of sentiment, hoping he will suppress his "natural" affection. In this way, the woman can be seen as akin to a stoic, who obviates sentiment in favor of a supposedly more truthful reason. The woman, however, may also be understood as acting from her own sentiments of desiring a child but not a marriage, desires which happen to differ from the more conventional desires of the man.

A lawsuit transpires between the two lovers: the man "claims his Son, whom he pretends a Right to educate as he pleas'd, according to the usual Maxims of the Law" while the woman "pleads… their express Agreement before their Commerce, and pretends, that he had renounc'd all Claim to any Offspring that might arise from their Embraces" (544). The man's claim rest on the traditional privileges of a patriarchal structure that would grant the father legal control over his offspring. The woman argues that there is a contractual agreement, which overrides the assumption of conventional patriarchal privilege, and that the man knowingly forfeited his paternal rights when entering the agreement. It might be noted, by the way, that similar cases arise in today's American legal system with regard to the degree to which sperm donors or even rapists, for example, have forfeited their paternal rights and responsibilities. The woman has negotiated a contract in the marketplace in order to fulfill her acknowledged desires. Sex to her has become a commercial transaction, for the purpose of procuring a child. The man has let the warmth of his passions overtake him, ignoring his express consent in giving up his progeny and the woman's explicit intention beforehand of remaining only friends. On the contrary, the man abides by conventional social norms and patriarchal expectations whereas the woman disregards

the sentiments of others—or, at least, makes such sentiments commensurable to remuneration—in order to fulfill her own ends.

Hume does not resolve the case, it seems to me, because it offers a foil to his own recommended temperament of the sentimentalist. Traditionally, a man was expected to provide for his wife and children, as Hume himself declares in his essay "Of Polygamy and Divorces": "in begetting children, [a man] is bound, by all ties of nature and humanity, to provide for their subsistence and education" (181). The anecdote Hume presents in the letter, however, offers a telling example of how little a woman of independent means might require a man's support or affections. For Hume, the natural and humane order of things is upset by the woman's economic transactions that reduce sentiments to a monetary value. Yet, Hume presents the case as a paradox since he fails to locate what the woman did wrong. Hume provides a counterexample to his own claims, then, letting the contradiction between the man who presses the woman and Eugenius stand rather than articulate a refutation. Each reader is allowed to draw his or her own conclusions; Hume acknowledges that both Eugenius and the sentiments of the ardent lover in the letter may seem to have overstepped appropriate bounds. The lover, by first pressing the woman to a romantic suit, in which he hopes she will share his romantic inclinations, and then, when that fails, pressing a law suit, makes himself appear emotionally overzealous, self-indulgent, and ultimately litigious. It is difficult to see how the male lover is the injured party since the terms of the contract were clearly specified. Moreover, "nature" has not necessitated that the woman want the man's provision and "humanity" does not require that she requite his passion.

The matter at issue in Hume's letter is the systemic prejudices ensconced in the legal and moral codes of society, not only the unequal gendered terms that the case reveals, but the conflict

between a morality based on (capitalist) contracts and a morality based on (normative) sentiments. In short, what obligations do people have to one another? Are individuals bound only by their consensual agreements, or do their debts to one another include a justified expectation of mutual sympathy—i.e., a reciprocation of the emotional and affective responses of the whole person, not just the role one serves as a means to someone else's ends? The coldblooded, mercantile world of commercial transactions, in Hume's fictional portrait, has encroached on the heart of the sentimentalist's concern, the intimate domestic sphere of sex, love, friendship, and family life.

III. Sentiment as Mediator Between Public and Private Spheres

Indeed, recognizing a similar problem, Hume struggles in "On the Standard of Taste" to articulate how aesthetic sentiments are grounded in a universal human nature when tastes seem to diverge so much in practice. At first he concedes that "no sentiment represents what is really in the object…. Beauty is no quality in things themselves: It exists merely in the mind which contemplates them; and each mind perceives a different beauty" (230). From this declaration that the diversity of tastes is due to its *subjective* nature, he turns to considering why we nonetheless often have such large *agreements* in our aesthetic judgments. He proposes that sentiments are produced by the relationship between an object's properties and the "original structure of the internal fabric," that is, an innate and universal human constitution (233). In describing this "internal fabric," his language straddles the line between corporeal organs and mental dispositions. Granted a common constitution in mind and body, Hume thinks, the sentiments we produce in regards to some given aesthetic object will be *objective* in so far as the sentiments are, at least under ideal conditions, universally shared.

Hume, however, shifts from claiming that we happen to have a common fabric—a common human nature—and thus shared sentiments, to saying that there is "a proper sentiment and perception," a claim that takes on normative force. His shift comes when he understands the sentiment of taste analogous to "the eye of a man in health," which perceives a "true and real colour, even while colour is allowed to be merely a phantasm of the senses," i.e., a Lockean secondary property (234). In making this move, Hume establishes a "standard" by relegating to a "defective state" (234) those who do not conform to the supposedly common, healthy fabric of "man in general" (239). He concludes that "the general principles of taste are uniform in human nature" (243), with deviations in taste due to defects in one's faculties, prejudices, lack of practice, or other such reasons. In such a move, Hume goes from allowing an empirical diversity of human constitutions, which determine subjective sentiments, to holding that a particular sentiment is proper for a given situation; any deviation from this norm is defective. Thus, Hume derives his standard of taste by a two-fold assumption: first, positing that there is a universal human nature and, second, upholding one version of human nature as a normative ideal. Any aesthetic judgments that fail to comport with this norm are then viewed as defective, rather than as invalidating the claim to universality.[13]

[13] In contrast, some critics view Hume as offering a different concept of personhood entirely. Lynn Festa states:

> Reversing the law of affective entropy [by which the image formed by the senses naturally decays]…. The idea or representation of another's feelings becomes the emotion itself, as the copy is seemingly converted to the original—although not quite, since this original is made after the image of another "in conformity to the images we form of them." (23)

In other words, affects are spontaneously transferred among individuals, who are themselves constituted by this process of sharing affects. Affects are ontologically prior to persons, then, and the ability to register and exchange such affects both makes one a person and, for Hume, threatens to dissolve one's personhood into a theatre of fleeting affective perceptions. Festa goes on to remark:

> The descriptions of sympathy offered by Smith and Hume pose a problem of reserve: something must be kept back in order to contain these bodies that keep dissolving (into tears, into sighs) and overflowing (with

Hume is anxious that the critic "preserve his mind free from all *prejudice*" (239) since "prejudice is destructive of sound judgment" (240). Hume goes on to remark that "where he lies under the influence of prejudice, all his natural sentiments are perverted" (241). In such a statement, Hume seems to posit a single "natural" human ideal. Yet, near the end of the essay, Hume turns again to accounting for the diversity of taste by attributing it to inevitable human differences:

> diversity in the internal frame [due to different "humours"] or external situation [due to differences in culture]… is entirely blameless…. diversity in judgment is unavoidable, and we seek in vain for a standard, by which we can reconcile the contrary sentiments. (244)

Hume makes some attempt to untangle which differences in taste result from such "unavoidable" diversity and which result from causes such as mental defects, prejudice, or lack of experience or practice; but the issue is never fully resolved.

> feelings). Alternatively, this heightened consciousness of a gap [of what remains or is held back] can generate additional displacements of the self and produce irony. (31)

Hume seems aware of this potential irony, and though he emphasizes the permeable borders of feeling persons, he nonetheless recognizes at some level that reserve is necessary to keep persons intact. This is another way to view Eugenius and the freethinking philosophical woman of Hume's fables: while Eugenius keeps leaking out to reanimate dead persons with his own projections of sentiment, the woman's reserve deadens the affections of others to maintain her own integrity. Though Hume favors Eugenius, some degree of reserve is necessary in order to prevent a fluidity of affect that would dissolve discrete persons; after all, Eugenius himself holds secrets back from his family, which he gushes to his friends.

In Sarah Ahmed's recent theory of emotions, the circulation of affect constructs boundaries between persons, cultures, and nations: "emotions create the very effect of the surfaces and boundaries that allow us to distinguish an inside and an outside in the first place," she writes (10). The feeling of pain creates the impression of a surface that has been violated, for example, just as the feeling of xenophobic hate or disgust may create an idea of national identity, a border that appears under threat from without. At times, Hume seems to come close to such a theory. Hume, however, writes as if more concerned with barriers that would obstruct a universality of feelings passed from one person to another—he often desires to increase the circulation of emotions more profusely—and sometimes appears ready to allow the discrete identities of persons or cultures to become a wash. Then again, a variety of Anglophone, eighteenth-century, middle-class prejudices are written into his rhetoric, erecting the very barriers he presumably hopes to erode by gesturing to a universal psychology of human nature.

This irresolution is, in fact, necessary for Hume's concept of sentiments, whether aesthetic or moral. Hume uses the ambiguity of sentiments as both a norm and a bias to establish a realm that mediates between the domestic private sphere of the family and the rapacious marketplace of an impersonal public sphere: the homosocial coterie of male friends engaged in both critical inquiry and emotional consolation. Against the private sphere, on the one hand, Hume utilizes the idea of sentiments as biases—merely domestic affections have no claim to larger, universal validity. The open market, on the other hand, ignores sentiments as a system of affective norms, in favor of cold, unfeeling transactions and contracts. Elsewhere Hume, a lifelong bachelor, remarks:

> I have often had thoughts of… writing a panegyric upon marriage: But, in looking around for materials, they seemed to be of so mixed a nature, that at the conclusion of my reflections, I found that I was as much disposed to write a satyr, which might be placed on the opposite pages of the panegyric: And I am afraid, that as a satyr is, on most occasions, thought to contain more truth than panegyric, I should have done their cause more harm than good by this expedient. ("Of Love and Marriage," 558)

"On Moral Prejudices" seems to come close to this proposal of an essay bifurcated into panegyric and satire. Both his sentimental man of feeling and his lady philosophe elide the problems of marriage: Eugenius's wife graciously dies after she has produced a litter of children while the Parisian freethinking woman arranges a legal contract to provide herself the benefit of a child out of wedlock. The friend who supposedly provides Hume with the letter couches the narrative of the new economic woman within a frame that gives evidence of Hume's own

homosociality: the philosophical situation Hume presents is then not an extreme and skeptical response to social mores, but merely an entertaining puzzle shared among friends. Yet, the satire of the overly rational and economically liberated woman can be read so as to make the man of feeling in the narrative seem fond and foolish, thereby reflecting on the weakness and irrationally indulgent sentiments of Eugenius, too, whom Hume presumably offers as the hero of a panegyric. The terms in which the characters are cast become susceptible to reversals. Hume himself frequently seems torn between the conclusions of the involved speculations of the philosopher and the practical, every-day, naturalized judgments of the man who plays backgammon and eats porridge, roles that are sometimes incommensurably at odds. Paradoxically, Hume is impelled to wander in his philosophical speculations quite out of the way of custom, but refuses to endorse any reasoning or motive that these speculations should change one's sentiments, which have been enforced and naturalized through custom. The problem nearly takes the form of the joke about the moral philosopher who recognizes after years of analysis that morality is based on intuitions, which, for him, have been unfortunately mitigated and impaired by his years of scrupulous reasoning to arrive at that very conclusion.

The status of sentiments is at the crux of many of Hume's dilemmas. "On Moral Prejudices" vacillates between attempting to determine proper sentiments and viewing sentiments themselves as biases of the mind. Are affects natural and hard-wired or are they performative and culturally relative? Upon what basis should norms of sentiment be enforced, especially in the face of a pluralistic society, which undermines the idea of a universal human nature, and which has an increasing dependence on an economy of free agents who engage in consensual obligations? Hume sees the increased freedom of rational agents presumed and abetted by early capitalist markets as threatening to usurp established affective norms.

Ironically, though, the standards of the heart that Hume ostensibly recommends are *not* those of custom, but are themselves part of an ongoing change in norms: his feminized, affectively indulgent man of feeling represents a new and somewhat reactionary development in the structures of feeling taking place in the eighteenth century against a society moving toward early capitalist conceptualizations of people as variable role-players in large bureaucratic systems and capitalist markets wherein the bonds between individuals are increasingly governed by contractual exchanges. While Hume concedes in his very title that the imposition of sentiments may be prejudicial and irrational, he hesitantly has recourse to such sentimental moral prejudices in order to stem the troublingly asocial anarchy he suggests may be let loose by a marketplace and a legal system otherwise unconstrained by affective norms.

Holding (It) Together: Faithful Readers and Charitable Interpretations in Fielding's *Joseph Andrews*

Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* (1742) can appear a rambling picaresque, digressing into byways of inset tales and manifestly superfluous episodes of bawdy and slapstick. The narrator teases that some material is "filler" and advises the reader that he or she may skip whole chapters. Though bookended by Joseph's persecution by the jealous Lady Booby, there are many diversions throughout the novel—indeed, diversion seems one of the novel's aims. Although the narrative interruptions may be a constant source of amusement (or irritation, depending on one's temperament), they also serve to condition the reader to offer charitable interpretations, having patience that a benevolent design will work itself out, even while still remaining wary of unscrupulous characters who cover their selfishness with convenient fictions. While Joseph's

story is about chastity, Parson Adams's story is about charity; the reader's own journey through the novel, not incidentally, requires developing the virtues of fidelity to the text in the face its many seemingly haphazard detours and a generous-minded assessment of its heroes, despite their exaggerated—and often naïve—unworldliness. Scenes of slapstick violence, the narrator's distanciation effects, and the alternative or inconclusive moral apothegms presented in the interpolated tales, however, may induce more skeptical, critical viewpoints in the reader. Repeated attempted rapes in the novel present a special case of divergent reader responses, especially as these scenes present challenges to both the framework of legal reasoning at the time and to a reader's moral sympathy. In these ways, the novel frequently evades the very didactic import it seems to promulgate, acknowledging a diversity of readers who each must wrestle with the commodification of virtue by dismembering and re-making (or re-membering) the text to locate a personal moral authority while simultaneously operating within communal norms or adjusting the boundaries of their communal identification.

I. Acts of Charity and the Commodification of Virtue

An animating concern throughout the novel is repudiating the threat of moral virtue (or its appearance) being reduced to the status of a commodity. Early on, the narrator states that "keeping the excellent pattern of his sister's virtues before his eyes, Mr. Joseph Andrews was chiefly enabled to preserve his purity" (14). Given Fielding's evident views toward *Pamela*, the reader might reasonably expect Joseph's supposed "purity" to be a ruse he exploits for the purposes of social-climbing, following the pattern of his sister. On the contrary, Joseph's purity is real, and, instead of winning a lucrative reward for his virtue, he is cast out of the house in which he had been a footman. Though Joseph sacrifices his own worldly interest for the sake of

moral purity, the trivial regard in which a male's chastity was held renders the scene almost comic. Martin Battestin remarks that "this, of course, was an age of the 'double standard'… and it would be scarcely conceivable that the author of *Tom Jones* seriously undertook his first novel in defense of male chastity" (113-114), yet Battestin hedges his bets by adding, "At the same time, it would be a mistake to underestimate the importance of chastity—even male chastity—in Fielding's morality" (114). Rather, the ambivalence of male chastity in *Joseph Andrews*, regarded as both all-important and entirely inconsequential, lays bare a cultural contradiction, which allows its readers to interrogate such value for themselves. The impulse to find Lady Booby's advances toward the unreceptive Joseph funny is partially held in check by the questions the scene raises about the value placed on virginity, especially as any humor generated by the scene also implies a recognition of a gendered double standard.

Likewise, our introduction to Adams sees him journeying to London for the purpose of selling his sermons, which he expects "might procure a very large sum (indeed, an immense one)" (63). However, when Adams attempts to use his sermons as collateral for a loan of merely three guineas, he meets with disappointment (61). Another clergyman informs Adams that his sermons are probably worthless, though this clergyman possibly devalues them since he then asks Adams to lend him one for an upcoming funeral oration, of which he has "not penned a line, though [he is] to have double price" (63). None of Adams's sermons will fit the purpose, though, since his lone funeral oration praises an upstanding magistrate whereas the devious clergyman must conduct a hypocritical eulogy on a known lush and cheat. The reader may initially suspect Adams to be a charlatan clergyman who has pecuniary motives since he hopes to profit by his sermons. But, again, the reader's initial expectations are quickly disrupted. As Joseph's celibacy is contrasted to Pamela's opportunistic sham virtue, Adams's impoverished piety is contrasted to

the devious clergyman who trades in moral respectability. Adams's valuation of his sermons as able to fetch a high price in the marketplace appears a byproduct of his own vanity, on the one hand, and evidence of a disturbing disjunction between spiritual worth and the price of commodities, on the other. If we feel inclined to laugh at the former, we are tempered by the moral critique implied by the latter.

Acknowledging—yet irreverently renouncing—the text's own status as a commodity, the very last sentence of the *Joseph Andrews* makes a sidelong allusion, essentially a dig at those who shill morality by writing conduct books for profit, and hence brings the framing concern full circle. Joseph will remain content in his retirement with Fanny and will not "be prevailed on by any booksellers, or their authors, to make his appearance in 'high-life'" (298). Though the sequel to *Pamela* referred to here, *Pamela's Conduct in High Life,* was written by John Kelly, the anonymous title page led to several spurious attributions of the work to Richardson himself. Fielding may be playing off the confusion of spurious sequels that animates *Quixote*'s self-parody in its second part, as *Joseph Andrews* also presents itself as a (spurious) second part to *Pamela*. In *Joseph Andrew*'s closing remark, then, Pamela's motives are seen as dubious since she professes high ideals while nonetheless enjoying high life, just as the author(s) who represent her are seduced by the profit motive to continue scribbling her story. If affectedly pious clergyman hustle their sermons in the marketplace, Fielding implies that Pamela—and, by extension, Richardson and/or Kelly—is little better as a novelist who churns out sententious conduct books and sanctimonious romances for remuneration.

The question is whether this charge can redound upon Fielding himself despite his ironic acknowledgement that literature can act as a form of capital. Fielding's narrator addresses the issue obliquely at the beginning of Book II, devoting a whole chapter to how books are divided.

He claims, "it becomes an author generally to divide a book, as it does a butcher his meat, for such assistance is of great help to both the reader and the carver" (75). Cutting up a text into books and chapters allows the reader greater ease of consumption and possibly enhances the writer's profit, either because it helps him pad out his work or because he can sell the divisions piecemeal for a greater price. The narrator concocts a bogus Homeric precedent, fabricating a history of the ancients' material culture to satirize contemporaneous Grub Street practices of writing—or promising to write—for ready money: "Homer… according to the opinion of some very sagacious critics, hawked them all [the twenty-four book of his epics] separately, delivering only one book at a time (probably by subscription)" (74). The novel's seemingly transparent awareness of the potential commodification of literary endeavors is undercut, as it were, by the narrator's shifting—and often shifty—positioning. In his transaction with the reader, Fielding's narrator lays bare the convenient and, at times, disposable packaging he uses in his wares, which permit the text to be readily consumable. Fielding also, however, creates a narrator who obfuscates, harangues, burlesque himself, and knowingly indulges in bloviated purple patches, making the text thornier and more difficult for the reader. Such narration interrupts and resists its reader's ability to ingest a ready-made meaning, didactic or otherwise, while the stylistic loose ends and moral ambiguity turn the responsibility for the production of meaning back upon the reader. Fielding thus reimagines the textual economy, offering an artifact that can be manipulated, cut up, cruised, deleted, skipped around in, bowdlerized, patch-worked, and written over. He foregrounds the ease of consuming a text with divisions only to undo the linear logic of authorial communication and the metaphor of digestion through the complexity of his narrative, which becomes not so much divided as self-divided.

Fielding situates his ironic narrator in contradistinction to narrators such as Pamela, whose first-person account in letters and journals depends upon her moral authority and evident sincerity to those whom she addresses. By consistently portraying his narrator striking some theatricalized pose, self-consciously performing for—and against—an audience, Fielding ensures his readers will not be "taken in" by the falsely devout posturing of simple, "heartfelt" confessions. Yet, in cultivating his reader's skepticism, Fielding does not aim to create cynics; in fact, by keeping his reader off-balance, an ultimately sentimental response can be achieved. After inculcating an initial though passing suspicion that Joseph and Parson Adams may have ulterior, pecuniary motives, they are next portrayed in the opposite extreme. Joseph, for instance, refuses to part with his gold piece to pay the debt of the inn (77). While a more designing character would not want to part with his money either, Joseph's withholding results from the attachment he conceives for the gold piece itself due to the fact that it was a gift from Fanny. Though Joseph has the power to extricate himself from his circumstance, he pays more regard to his overly precious affections for this love-token than to his financial obligations. The outward result may be the same as if he were a miser, yet Joseph is revealed as mawkish. Such an excess of sentiment makes Joseph appear foolish, perhaps even morally bankrupt, since it results in him failing to fulfill his worldly contracts.

Nonetheless, the reaction of the innkeeper's wife, Mrs. Tow-wouse, reframes the question of value at issue in this exchange. Mrs. Tow-wouse would have consented to forgiving Joseph's debt on the presumption of credit since "Joseph's beauty… had made some impression even on that piece of flint which that good woman wore in her bosom by way of a heart" (77). She, too, is portrayed as not as concerned about settling her accounts as she is of furthering her amatory desires. But the skinflint Mrs. Tow-wouse, who would at first be unfaithful to her

husband in favoring Joseph, is also flighty in her passions: when Joseph pulls out the gold piece, it "caused Mrs. Tow-wouse's eyes to water" (77). Her greed gets the better of her, though the acquisitive joy she shows is ironically couched in terms of the clichéd sentimental trope of tears. Mrs. Tow-wouse's passion is for the pecuniary value of the gold piece, whereas Joseph's seeming acquisitiveness ultimately derives from his sentiments for Fanny. While both their passions appesar excessive, through this reversal, Joseph's passion is nonetheless portrayed as the nobler one.

Then again, Mrs. Tow-wouse says, "I suppose it was given you by some vile trollop, some miss or other; if it had been the present of a virtuous woman, you would not have had such a value for it" (77-78). Perhaps Mrs. Tow-wouse implies that the gold piece is not a love-token, but rather the money the good-looking Joseph earned from being a gigolo, a role Lady Booby hoped he would succumb to, and that the reason he is reluctant to part with the gold piece is that it abets his vanity. Or, perhaps more likely, she implies that Joseph would not be so anxious in losing a present from a woman whose fidelity he felt secure in. In the former case, we know that Joseph refused prostituting himself to Lady Booby for advancement, and so the irony of the accusation is the disparity between appearance and reality; in the latter case, ironic disparity results between Mrs. Tow-wouse's casting aspersions on the virtuous Fanny directly after her libidinous attempt at seducing Joseph. Nonetheless, her comment places doubt upon Fanny's virtue, a situation continued by other hints throughout the novel, not least of which is the fact that Fanny is exposed as Pamela's sister, and may be yet another ingénue using her "innocence" for gain, potentially making Joseph's zeal appear ridiculous. In the scene with Mrs. Tow-wouse, though, Joseph is rescued from his predicament by the "charity" of Mrs. Slipslop, the lusty kitchen maid who has previously attempted to seduce him. This is a further ironic reversal. By

accepting Slipslop's favor, Joseph in fact trades his good looks for remuneration after all, though Joseph may be so naïve and open-hearted as to be oblivious to Slipslop's ulterior motives.

By problematizing charity in such scenes, the novel raises the question: if charity begins at home, how far along the scale of Christian brotherhood does "home" thereby extend? The novel frequently construes the question of which characters deserve charity in terms of an endogamous versus exogamous arbitration. Confusion, for example, arises when Adams calls a fellow clergyman a "brother" and he is mistaken to mean "his natural brother and not his brother in divinity" (143). The innkeeper assumes his blood brother will lend Adams money, only to be disappointed that it was Adams's tight-fisted fellow clergyman that was meant. Adams's ample extension of brotherhood to others, whether clergy or not, is indicative of his charitable disposition: he includes everyone in the fold. By contrast, the uncharitable Parson Trulliber regards his parishioners as "not of the same species with himself," exulting, the innkeeper says, "like a turkey-cock," though the inn-keeper ironically takes the same attitude he attributes to Trulliber (146). The world of *Joseph Andrews* is filled with scoundrels, quacks, hypocrites, and cheats. The gullible are at the mercy of those with guile, and being too liberal in charity may result in aiding pretenders and prigs. Even accepting seeming charity is a danger—as Adams finds out when he accepts an invitation to dinner at the squire's house, only to be roasted as the butt of the practical jokes played on him by the squire's cronies.

Nonetheless, the greater danger nearly always lies with not extending one's charity far enough, as the parsimonious and unsavory characters often use excuses, legal issues, lies, and their own vanity to prevent them from a more generous dispensation of their fortunes. Lady Booby's attitude epitomizes this stance when she claims that Joseph is a "vagabond, and he shall not settle here, and bring a nest of beggars into the parish" (241), refusing him any benevolence,

when she is in fact the one most responsible for putting Joseph out of work as a result of his virtuous behavior. She is juxtaposed to her brother, Mr. Booby, who "entertained in the most splendid manner, after the custom of the Old English hospitality, which is still preserved in some very few families in the remote parts of England" (295). Yet, Mr. Booby only lavishes his generosity once Fanny is revealed as his sister in-law and Joseph is revealed as a well-born gentleman. Hence, the problem of charity can be seen in light of the rise of urban industrialization, which breaks apart close-knit, familial communities, displacing them further apart along an imperialistic network of highways that connect formerly outlandish areas to the capital. Mr. Booby's so-called "Old English" hospitality, based in the hospitality of an agrarian community that purportedly existed in ancient and provincial regions, can also be viewed as nostalgic, a product of nationalistic myth-making. To be charitable at home depends on creating familial and nationalist myths about what constitutes that home. Just as Mr. Booby must first regard Fanny and Joseph as family before he welcomes them, the nostalgic myth of Old English customs may harbor a nascent xenophobia.

Acts of charity in *Joseph Andrews* often demonstrate the line between those with whom a character identifies and those whom the character outcasts as other. In a world in which the appearance of virtue can be traded as a commodity, acts of charity may come with selfish ulterior motives. The narrator's control of information manipulates appearances so that they are frequently inverted, and the reader is led to question who is genuinely deserving of charity. Likewise, the reader must work to distinguish who merits charitable interpretations, despite that character's initially foolish-seeming or putatively self-centered actions.

II. The Role of Slapstick in Negotiating the Reader's Moral Identifications

Scenes of slapstick violence are similarly used to negotiate the reader's moral identifications, symbolically punishing the foibles of otherwise good characters and thereby allowing the reader to excuse their faults while sympathizing with their pain. The unworldly Joseph stumbles along in a Chaplinesque frolic from one near fatal incident to another, making fortuitous yet often unknowing escapes from the dangers that surround him. Parson Adams, likewise, is continually embroiling himself in unnecessary risks through his fanatical devotion to his own good intentions and through an overweening trust in his fellows. He gets the blood of a hog's pudding dumped on him for defending Joseph (99) and is almost sent to jail for defending Fanny from a ravisher (124). Symbolically, Adams takes on the blood of human sins and would "deliver himself into the hands of justice" (118), trusting "rather to his own innocence than his heels" (121). He is a Christ-like figure, redeeming others through his own suffering. His "ritual vilification," writes Neil Rhodes, "has its origins in the tormenting of Christ himself" (114). Joseph and especially Adams often wear the guise of the holy fool; yet, despite their superlative virtue, neither can be considered ethical models for the reader's emulation. Though the most pointed satire is directed at the unscrupulous or hypocritical characters they encounter, both Joseph and Adams are frequently laughingstocks, however much they may also earn the reader's sympathy or pity. After all, Adams is not only imbrued with hog's pudding, he throws his life's labor—a translation of *Æschylus*—into the flames (130), a parsimonious fellow parson later pushes him into the mire of a pigsty (138), he gets dunked in a tub of cold water among other practical jokes played on him (212), he has a chamber-pot knocked over his head (218), and he nakedly fights Slipslop who subsequently accuses him of raping her (287). Many of these misadventures are due to Adams's benighted idealism, a quixotic faith in his own, as well as others', innocence.

Despite the "Author's Preface" where Fielding contends that "the true Ridiculous (as it appears to me) is affectation.... [which] proceeds from one of these two causes: vanity or hypocrisy," Adams and Joseph seem the most ridiculous characters in the novel for somewhat different reasons (10). Though the villains—such as Peter Pounce and Lady Booby—are exposed as hypocritical and vicious, covering up their knowingly nefarious schemes, at least their motives are clear, their perceptions of the world are scrutable, and their actions are instrumental to their purposes. The "grotesque" characters—such as Slipslop and Didapper—may be misguided, vain, or affected, believing they are more attractive or charming than they really are. But even they do not appear as ridiculous as Adams and Joseph. Adams's pedantic, steadfast clinging to his abstract principles often impedes the more real and heartfelt values he possesses; similarly, Joseph's overblown sentimentality can backfire, as we have seen, when the token gold piece becomes worth more to him than its literal weight in in gold. Adams and Joseph can thus seem "mechanical" at times, Bergsonian clowns irrationally allowing their motives, perceptions, values, and beliefs to warp each other in ways that make them trip over themselves before they can arrive at their destinations. Their ridiculousness is not due to their moral failings per se, but rather to various conflicts between their good hearts, which are connected to low earthly things, and their high-minded regard for abstract principles.

Though Parson Adams rarely elicits the reader's tears, he is a sympathetic—but not an exemplary—figure. As Neil Rhodes states, "Adams is… too much of a figure of fun" to be Fielding's ideal of a good man (114); none of the characters "acquire exemplary status" (117), which includes the narrator. Adams falls from his horse near the end of the novel, representing his fallen nature rather than the prelapsarian state of grace that his name might signify. The narrator tells us, "This accident afforded infinite merriment to the servants, and no less

frightened poor Fanny… but the mirth of the one and terror of the other were soon determined, when the parson declared he had received no damage" (295). Rather than pity the parson, since he is not hurt, it is determined that he is a figure fit for the reader's laughter. The passage attests to the hairsbreadth that separates slapstick violence from genuinely tragic circumstances. Slapstick depends on readers' sympathetic regard for the afflicted character, whether Buster Keaton or Wile E. Coyote, and the readers' knowledge that the violence is merely phantasmatic, emphasized by slapstick's repetitious and exaggerated style. Slapstick in which the pain is too evidently real can appear cruel to some readers or viewers whereas others may have the capacity to assume the pain will only be temporary or to dismiss real pain as if it were fictional. At any rate, Adams literally falls off his high horse because he was "exulting" that the Church forms and ceremonies would be carried out to the letter in Joseph's marriage arrangement (294). He thus immediately suffers a symbolic punishment for his pompous and overly fastidious disposition, much as Wile E. Coyote, for instance, is repeatedly blown-up or sent plunging down a cliff-side for his hubris (or possibly for his foolhardy loyalty to Acme products). Neither Adams nor Mr. Coyote actually gets hurt, but the symbolic suffering purges the character of his hubris while eliciting both pity and laughter.

Similar in structure to slapstick is the incident where Adams is told that his youngest son has drowned. The pain in this instance is not physical, but it certainly comes as a slap in the face: Adams has just declared that "no Christian ought so to set his heart on any person or thing in this world, but that, whenever it shall be required or taken from him in any matter by Divine Providence, he may be able, peaceably, quietly, and contentedly, to resign it" (265). The suddenness of the tale of his son's drowning, following on the heels of Adams's sententious preaching, emphasizes that it comes as a symbolic rebuke to his stoic declaration, especially as

Adams proceeds to lament grievously over his dear lost child. A more comic sidelight occurs when Joseph attempts to comfort Adams with "arguments he remembered" from Adams's own sermons and discourses, but to no avail (265). Joseph's ineffective persuasion reveals that Adams's sermonizing has been in bad faith. Like slapstick, however, Adams's pain proves to have been wholly phantasmatic since the teller of the tale had been too hasty—Adams's youngest son is still alive. Thus, Adams receives his comeuppance but no real harm is done. Unlike slapstick, this scene is more likely to provoke a sense of dark (if somewhat heavy-handed) incongruity, a stark reversal of fate, rather than humorous guffaws: the violence in this case, though unreal, is nonetheless too close to pathos, especially as there is no dramatic irony on a first reading since the reader, too, assumes Adams's son has drowned. We are more likely to pity the poor parson than find mirth in his situation. However, Adams's inability to take comfort in his own advice acts as his comeuppance for delivering such censorious lectures.

The passage is preceded by Adams's somewhat inept interpretations of scripture. He upbraids Joseph for his haste to marry Fanny by partially quoting from the Bible. He says, "the text will be, child, Matthew the 5th, and part of the 28th verse: 'Whosoever looketh on a woman so as to lust after her.' The latter part I shall omit, as foreign to my purpose" (264). The latter part, however, specifies that the lustful looker "has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (*KJV*). Joseph, of course, hopes to prevent committing such a sin by making Fanny his lawful wife—Adams's oversight thus misconstrues the import of the quote. Better to marry than to burn, Joseph might have retorted. Adams is bookish and kind-hearted, but he is neither a commendable Latitudinarian preacher nor does he always have an accurate handle on the texts he professes. Adams then sermonizes upon the story of Isaac and Abraham, claiming that:

> All passions are criminal in their excess; and even love itself, if it is not subservient to our duty, may render us blind to it. Had Abraham so loved his son Isaac as to refuse the sacrifice required, is there any of us who would not condemn him? …You are too much inclined to passion, child. (265)

Whatever the ultimate import of the much debated story of Abraham and Isaac, certainly it does not show that Abraham failed to love his son. Isaac was the son born to Abraham late in his life by his wife Sarai to fulfill the covenant promised by God—Abraham demonstrated extraordinary resilience in his willingness to sacrifice Isaac *despite* his affections for the boy. The tale, rather, demonstrates Abraham's faith in the incomprehensible logic of the covenant, which promised him a son only to seem to take that son away. The Biblical story foreshadows Abraham Adams's own predicament when he thinks he loses his son, and it highlights how Adams's affections triumph over his supposed duty.

Again, Adams misconstrues the meaning of scripture. His rhetorical question is ironic since many would not blame Abraham had he not sacrificed his son, and some would go so far as to positively blame him for his absurd willingness to kill his son. Another understanding of the tale might contrast the Old Testament's injunction to dutifulness with the New Testament's doctrine of love. Especially for Latitudinarian preachers who emphasizes one's good deeds over one's faith in the strict letter of the law, the tale of Abraham and Isaac makes for a problematic case in how his unwavering faith wins out over his common sense and love for one's fellow creatures. Though in some instances, such as Adams's emendation of "debts" for trespasses" in the Lord's Prayer, Adams seems an acute Biblical critic (184), it is evident that Abraham Adams's obsessive fidelity to the letter of scripture can often result in glaring oversights, and we

are led to question his conclusions just as we are invited to ponder the contradictory import the Biblical tale has for Latitudinarian precepts. Similarly, Adams misinterprets Joseph's character, who the reader knows has refused the advances of several women already in the novel, when he admonishes him for his excessive passion.

Abraham Adams cannot live up to the heroic strictures of his namesake. Yet, that is a good thing, Fielding seems to imply. Adams's grief-stricken reaction when he supposed his son had died and his gratitude to the person who saved his little boy portray him as sympathetically emotional, passionate in nature rather than stoically duty-bound. Adams has many foibles: bookishness, pedantry, naiveté, excessive drinking, forgetfulness, political ineptitude, vanity in his role as a schoolmaster, impossible high-mindedness, a tendency to nitpick, and carelessness when it comes to money matters to name only some of the more obvious. Despite these many faults, he also has an ardent faith in his own essential innocence. The narrative does not position Adams as a true hypocrite, however, and he does not become the butt of a satiric attack, at least not in any traditional sense. His character is akin to the philosopher Thales, who reportedly fell in a ditch while gazing at the heavens. Like Thales, Adams is constantly tumbling in the mire because of his inattention to his earthly course; the heaviness of lumpish matter—with its gross accidents and impurities—pulls down his airy idealism and frustrates his gaze into futurity. Though the narrative suggests that Adams should focus more on the here-and-now since his idealism often makes him blind to worldly realities, it also depicts his praiseworthy Christian benevolence in the face of a self-interested, mercantile culture. As Oscar Wilde has Dumby famously quip in *Lady Windermere's Fan*, "We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars" (402). Adams's sundry failures are forgiven by the reader not only because he suffers symbolic retribution for them through incidents of slapstick, but also because his

underlying earnestness, charitable disposition, and trusting heart prove him to be a steadfast moral character. Ironically, though, Adam's innate ethics sometimes go astray of the faith of the Old Testament patriarchs he professes. Adams is mocked for his Old Testament values much as Joseph is satirized for his older aristocratic values of chivalry; both become honorable if nonetheless quixotic figures in the mercantile world they traverse.

In many ways, Adams is the converse of a hypocrite: whereas a hypocrite consciously pretends to be conventionally pious while his actions are secretly self-interested, Adams often declares an obnoxiously sententious rigidity to the law, though his unwitting behavior shows him as fallible, forgiving, and affectionate. The constant slapstick and other symbolic punishments he suffers act to negotiate a moral boundary line with the reader, situating Adams between the poles of complete identification and somewhere beyond the pale. Within this range, satire often pushes characters away from the reader; sentimental moments of tenderness and pity, by contrast, may help bring a reader closer to the character (though the extreme of mawkishness can backfire and result in the character's excommunication from the reader's sympathies). Slapstick partakes of satire's exposure of a fault—whether "heroic" flaw or moral foible—by enacting violence to the character as a result of it. Yet, slapstick also shares similarities to sentimental pathos since the reader may, despite also laughing, sympathize with the pain the character suffers since the character is generally likeable, not one the reader wishes to exile and "otherize." By these means, slapstick plays out tragedy on a smaller, comic scale: the hero's over-reaching brings about a pratfall rather than a downfall. Hence, though occasionally slapstick may make us feel superior to the bumbler, it often functions to bring us closer to the character, helping us relate our own well-meaning failures to the character's humbling self-defeat. The prevalence of slapstick in

Joseph Andrews thus gives shape to the reader's sympathy and negotiates a sense of endogamous communal identification with its protagonists.

III. Moral Boundaries: The Case of Attempted Rape

The drawing of moral boundary lines is obviously manifest in two of the novel's main themes, chastity and charity. Joseph's chastity is threatened not only by trying to keep Mrs. Tow-wouse, Lady Booby, Betty, and others at a proper distance from him, i.e., out of his pants, but also by being too closely related to Fanny, so that their marriage appears blocked by its incestuous implications. To remain chaste, then, is to maintain an appropriate boundary: being neither too close to strangers nor too close to one's family—yet not too distant and cold to one's spouse or one's fellow travelers, either. Lady Booby's legal machinations to keep the banns from being published rest on the distinction of whether Joseph is settled inside the parish "in law" or "in fact," again pointing out how moral determinations rest on the drawing of boundaries, though those distinctions happen to be dubious in this case (241).

Likewise, Joseph and Fanny's supposedly sibling relationship literalizes Adams's repeated metaphor of calling them his "children." Adams claims he stands in a paternalistic relation to "all those whom God entrusted to his cure" (145-146). This sentiment appears to be shared by Adams's parishioners since at his return "they flocked about him like dutiful children round an indulgent parent" (236). Fanny and Joseph's supposedly familial relation also attest to the commonplace that all humanity is related in Christian genealogies, perhaps with a nod to the question of whether incest occurred among the earliest patriarchs.

More troubling for contemporary readers than incest, however, is Fanny's status as a potential victim of male violence. Fielding's often comic treatment of attempted rape presents a

unique quandary for a reader's sympathy, both today and in the eighteenth century. As Simon Dickie notes, there are no less than "five attacks" on Fanny in the novel (572). Dickie argues that:

> the rape theme offers a particularly complex instance of the forensic influence that scholars have long identified in Fielding's later works—his increasing reliance on legal metaphors, his preoccupation with distinguishing true from false testimony, and his development of a distinctive narrative voice that carefully weighs evidence and asks his readers to do the same. (573)

Nevertheless, Fanny is an erotic cipher. At times, she seems to genuinely encourage the attentions of her would-be ravishers; at other instances, she appears all modesty and innocence. However, in the context of Lady Booby, who attempts to provoke Joseph by saying she will not press charges, and Slipslop, who hurls the charge of rape against Adams to protect her own dubious reputation, the assaults upon Fanny point toward a disturbing disregard for female victims. It is as if Fanny's very innocence both invites men to take advantage of her while, simultaneously, her innocence acts as a barrier that protects her from any real harm. The inviolability of her chastity is literalized in one instance where she is only saved when the goddess Chastity fetches Joseph to her rescue.

Then again, Fanny's reputed innocence is rendered suspect in a few cases, such as when, for example, she and Joseph engage in a "dalliance, which, though consistent with the purest innocence and decency, neither he would have attempted nor she permitted, before any witness" (199). The lack of a witness renders the dalliance decent since it does not impinge upon Fanny's

perceived respectability, yet the narrator seems to sarcastically hint that the essence of purity itself may be a matter of perception. The idea of witnesses partakes of a legal discourse, in which contracts—such as marriage—take place; in the absence of witnesses, disputes are often reduced to the different parties' testimony. The narrator's permissiveness about their dalliance is nearly voyeuristic, as the narrator looks in upon their frolic, with the reader leering over the narrator's shoulder. Thus, the narrator's own testimony may be fraught with contradiction since he and the reader *are* witnesses to the event.

Dickie writes that, although Fanny might resist her attackers, she never "uses the word rape and nobody suggests" she prosecutes her assailants: "no modest women would actually prosecute someone for rape" since "no woman would go before a justice and make her accusation with the level of anatomical detail that was required" (581). In this context, to even bring the charge of rape against someone implicates a female in the guilt of her attacker. Fielding does, however, raise scruples about blaming the victim of a rape. When Adams first rescues Fanny from a group of young men intent on robbing her virtue, he has the tables turned on him by the attackers, who accuse him and Fanny of being highway robbers. The gang of would-be rapists begin cracking jokes about Fanny and Parson Adams (123). The scene, while portraying a real travesty of justice, turns into merely a literary travesty; the narrative digresses into a contest about "capping" Latin verses, then a satire about the judge's and the other parson's ignorance of Greek (123-126). Although presumably the readers' sympathy is with Adams and Fanny, the narrator seems oddly aligned with the robbers and would-be rapists, as he is more invested in cracking his own intellectual jokes than confronting the very real and serious problem of the prosecution of rapists that is, in fact, being represented in the scene.

Dickie believes Fielding was "skeptical that there was ever such a thing as non-consensual sex, and simultaneously—with no attempt at consistency—acknowledging that it happened all the time and insisting that women both wanted and soon got over it" (590). Whatever may have been Fielding's opinion, the pattern of narrative dodges to address rape in *Joseph Andrews* is unsettling. The repeated incidents of attempted rape are treated with a cavalier dismissiveness, and they quickly become excuses for the narrator to digress into slapstick, bawdy, mock heroic, gender farce, classical allusions, or literary in-jokes. Such treatment may be appropriate for Parson Adams's good-natured sententiousness or Joseph's struggles with fidelity, but it seems a failure of the imagination to transpose the actual violence of rape into the realm of comic fantasy. The profound consequences of rape are never adequately addressed. Instead, Fanny—though a robust dairymaid—is portrayed as entirely defenseless and must be rescued by Adams or Joseph every time she is assaulted, except in the case of Beau Didapper, who is portrayed as being so effeminate as to pose no real threat. However, at the same time, Fanny's "virtue" is portrayed as unassailable. Its potential loss would redound to her entire blame, though the narrative portrays many of her rescues as a result of fortuitous happenstance. Indeed, the attempted rapes are opportunities for Joseph and Adams to display their knight-errantry and (ambivalently mock-) heroism; the potential terror and harm from Fanny's point-of-view are never given much consideration since she remains little more than an objectified sexual shibboleth. This inconsistency within the text—especially as the novel is in direct response to *Pamela*'s likewise problematic cases of attempted rape—appears as a moral evasion, which, given the overall didactic and satiric import of the novel, is a serious artistic flaw, as well.

Similarly, the only other benevolent woman in the novel, Wilson's wife, remains off-stage where she "assists her sick neighbor," (192) more of an idealized pastoral goddess of the imagination than an actual character. Nonetheless, even her portrayal is problematic: Wilson's wife is the heir of a wine merchant, as if these "unadulterated" vessels represent her inheritance of unblemished purity, yet the wine is "universally decried by the vinters" (188) since they make the vinters' own cheating wares look cheaper by comparison. Wilson's tale acts as an allegory in which his wife's pure and priceless vintage is contrasted to the sullied "vessels" of the kept women and whores that he describes formerly abusing. Yet, rather than acting to highlight his wife's antithesis to the prostitutes, the comparison reinforces the problematic metaphor of women as acquiescent receptacles for male domination. That Wilson's wife is the daughter of a wine merchant also casts an ambivalent penumbra: she is both potentially abetting drunken and licentious bacchanals, connecting her to Wilson's earlier mistresses, while offering him a respectable business that saves him from financial—and moral—bankruptcy.

The scenes of attempted rape, though, should be contextualized in terms of eighteenth-century conceptions of law and women's rights; in this regard, they may actually appear sympathetic to women who could not, due to onerous moral assumptions, prosecute their rapists. Susan Staves, with a sly sense of humor, admits her own inquiry into Fielding's rape scenes "may seem like an unduly heavy-handed feminist killjoy project—perhaps it is" (89). Nevertheless, she is kinder to Fielding than I have been here. She points out that at the time Fielding wrote the novel *attempted* rape was not a crime under the presumption that no actual harm was done: criminal law operated largely upon retributive principles. Fielding's scenes of attempted rape, then, portray an important doctrinal development in legal thinking, laying stress on the intention of the perpetrator. When attempted rape was eventually recognized as a crime, it

allowed more women to prosecute actual rapists without necessarily being stigmatized by appearing to have had their "virtue" compromised by accusing the men of the lesser charge. In Fanny's first attempted rape scene in *Joseph Andrews*, Adams strikes Fanny's ravisher unconscious and mistakenly believes he has killed him. Adams's meditation on whether he should "make his escape or deliver himself into the hands of justice" (118) clearly ironizes the situation because the ravisher—though he did not succeed in violating Fanny—is the one who the reader knows is actually guilty in this case. Staves also demonstrates that Fielding's attempted rape scenes are concerned with establishing a basis for forensic evidence that can distinguish the false cry of rape from the true one, especially in cases that rested almost entirely on the testimony of the disputants. Though Fielding explores the question, his answer seems unsatisfactory, for, as Staves says, "in Fielding's comic world, an unchaste middle-aged woman, one without even a pretty face, cannot be an object of rape," though in his darker, more realistic, late novel *Amelia* the contrast "between the beautiful, chaste woman who attracts genuine rape attempts and the unpretty, unchaste woman who falsely cries rape [is] most ambiguous" (96). Perhaps Fielding, too, began to recognize the unsatisfactory nature of his comic treatment of rape.

The comic treatment of rape—at least in the terms it strikes many readers today—may suggest a limit-case of effective self-parody: when dealing with horrifically violent evils, representing a multiplicity of views that mutually undermine each other acts most often as an apology for the perpetrators, allowing readers to overlook the literal pain of the victims as they are distracted by such things as puns and literariness, capped verses and Greek allusions. In the eighteenth century, the very cry of "rape"—if spoken softly—was supposed to cunningly provoke a ravisher just as a lady who protested too much was supposedly showing her

willingness to be bedded. These strategies of self-parodically inverting a discourse enforced male privilege, opportunistically using the specter of irony to disempower female agency. Likewise, *Joseph Andrews*, as it veers toward a comic-pastoral fantasy, neglects to adequately account for the problems that it raises. If understood against a realist narrative, not only is it more probable that Fanny would have ended as a rape victim, but it is also more likely that Joseph and Adams would have both ended destitute in a debtors' prison. Only the witty stage-management of the narrator saves them from such tragedy, but it cannot save the novel from the charge of seeming contrived. If Pamela artfully arranges her circumstances to avoid tragedy and gain fortune, it is the consummately artful narrator of *Joseph Andrews* that is most responsible—rather than the intrinsic moral goodness of any of its characters—for guiding the protagonists to avert catastrophe and triumph in a happy ending.

In regulating the reader's sympathy, the hyper-literate, masculine voice of the narrator intervenes to prevent any sense of Fanny's interiority. We are kept decidedly outside her mind, and not just in contrast to, say, Richardson's exhaustive psychological account in *Clarissa*, which even Fielding found himself surprisingly moved by. Our sympathy for Fanny is as a passive victim, rather than as an empowered and fully conscious agent. Her name, in fact, already reduces her to her sexual bottom line. Perhaps she is meant to be such a pawn, however, as all the characters, in fact, can appear at times like chess-pieces for the intrusive narrator to move around at his disposal.

IV. Distanciation Effects of the Narrator and the Variety of Reader Response

The narrator's intrusive handling of plot and characters operates to prevent absorptive reading practices and creates readers who actively question the moral order presented in the text, including the narrator's own authority. Simon Varey writes that:

> In Fielding's technique, readers need that narrator, for satire requires a satirist. Mockery is not funny unless we share a point of view with the mocker. As several critics have pointed out, if we laugh as we read *Joseph Andrews*, our laughter is continuous with the narrator's. (45)

Varey overlooks that theatrical satire—including Fielding's own—can get along just fine without an explicit narrator, and that *Joseph Andrews* partakes of such a theatrical mode. More to the point, Varey excuses contemporary readers' annoyance with the narrator, but concedes Fielding's narrator can seem "heavy-handed," even "laborious" at times (34). Varey also admits to the narrator's consistent "tendency toward exaggeration" (39). Varey argues that "this is all evidence of a controller, a narrator who has the power over words, someone who offers interpretation and commentary, someone who will delay the punch line until he sees fit" (40). I agree that Fielding's narrator is controlling—over-controlling, one might say; but the narrator's irony works against his own authority much of the time by inculcating an active reader. The narrator provokes readers to resist his own contrivances, which an active reader can perceive places contradictory designs upon more passive reading practices.

The narrator expends at least as much energy chiding the gullibility of his two main protagonists as he does in satirizing his cast of malicious villains. Similarly, the narrator also implicitly reproves the reader's possible gullibility. Yet, through such techniques as creating

delays and obfuscations, appearing to pad out chapters, telling the reader to skip sections, indulging in elaborate set-pieces, highlighting lubricious content, continually arranging absurd coincidences, and what Bryan Burns calls an "almost cinematic sense of zigzagging among styles of writing," *Joseph Andrews* also trains the reader to push back against the narrator, in turn. Feelings of annoyance, impatience, and of being condescended to, for instance, are not byproducts of one's failure to be an ideal eighteenth-century reader, as Varey suggests. Rather, they are the result of carefully arranged narrative constructions to produce distanciation effects.

Varey seems to take at face value the preface's declaration:

> In the diction, I think, burlesque itself may be sometimes admitted; of which many instances will occur in this work, as in the description of battles, and some other places, not necessary to be pointed out to the classical reader, for whose entertainment those parodies or burlesque imitations are chiefly calculated.
>
> But though we have sometimes admitted this in our diction, we have carefully excluded it from our sentiments and characters; for there it is never properly introduced, unless in writings of the burlesque kind, which this is not intended to be. (8)

Yet, Fielding implies that he knows not all of his readers are "the classical reader," especially since this is a novel, a low comedic prose romance that would attract middle-class readers, women, and others who would perhaps not have been brought up in the classical tradition. If the classical reader finds such episodes entertaining, Fielding's need to offer an apology indicates that he knows others will likely find such episodes tedious. As the marketplace admits of novels as commodities, newly accessible to the middle-class, Fielding seeks to account for this

burgeoning diversity of readers. He accepts that there will be no ideal reader, that each reader's knowledge and sensibility will differ. Clueing us in that Fielding may be speaking tongue-in-cheek when he appears to state his intentions in the preface, we can recognize that the burlesque nature of the novel is not confined to its language alone. Even his so-called heroes are burlesque types derived in part from *Don Quixote*, and the grandiose idealism of Adams or the maudlin attitude of Joseph get routinely sent-up. Maynard Mack writes that Adams, "like his forebear," Quixote, is "partly hero and partly dupe" (54). Yet, if *Joseph Andrews* is burlesque, it is many other things as well, almost as many as the different kinds of readers it invokes.

The novel goes out of its way, literally, to demonstrate the diversity of story-tellers and interlocutors, readers and non-readers in the marketplace, not only in the narrator's addresses to various naratees, but in the novel's panorama of characters, from the illiterate Fanny to the over-read yet oft-benighted Adams. Paul Baines notes that Adams's translation of Æschylus, which he absentmindedly throws in the flames, "is actually one of many missing, disputed, or rewritten books in the novel" (52). Baines argues that "the loss of the manuscript… constitute[s] a motif: the classical inheritance under threat" (51). While this may be true, Adams's insistence on the ancients over the moderns is also ridiculed. Baines comes closer to home when he says, "*Joseph Andrews* tries something more difficult and complex: an overwriting, a kind of viral infection of the prior text" (56). Not only *Pamela* is subjected to a playful intertextuality, but the ending of *Joseph Andrews* rewrites *Œdipus*, Lady Booby rehearses the role of Potiphar in the Biblical narrative of Joseph, the preacher George Whitefield is repeatedly parodied, the theatrical bed-trick is appropriated from countless Restoration comedies, mock-epic spoofs allude to Virgil and Homer, Cibber's biography is lampooned, and the whole resembles Cervantes' *Quixote*, to mention some of the more obvious examples. Furthermore, the story is comprised of many

instances of other mishandled and maligned narratives and manuscripts, such as Adams's lost sermons, Wilson's traduced play, the capped lines of Latin verse that are misremembered, Joseph's bawdy ballad that Adams ignores, the naïve letters Joseph sends to his sister, Little Dick Adams's storybook he never finishes, the interrupted tale of Lenora, and the disputed texts of the law and the marriage license itself, which bring the story to its finale. Individually, the various characters' misreadings can seem a source of satire, perhaps acting as a correction or foil to actual readers. Yet, the unceasing proliferation of botched and mangled texts throughout *Joseph Andrews* indicates, on the contrary, that misreading is inevitable and even fruitful.

I might add that my own copy of *Joseph Andrews* now has its spine cracked in half, its dog-eared edges crumbling, and odd pages falling out or disintegrating, as if to reinforce the idea of the unwieldy nature of texts, which are always compromised between their fragmentary representations in one's mind and the sometimes equally fragmentary material product that contains them. In fact, the book I own has become an emblem of self-parody: severed in half, but jerry-rigged together, visibly displaying itself as a much used and valued commodity, yet, because of that very handling, paradoxically announcing its relative worthlessness, as well. The divisions that Fielding's narrator self-consciously implants in the text have given way to my own divisions and demarcations, thumbing and fumbling, or those marks brought about by physical wear-and-tear. The pages are blotted with underlines and marginalia, interlarded with asterisks and notes to self, the printed page almost defaced at times by my cross-examinations of it. Rereading, writing over the text, rearranging it, rendering it in citational scraps, and offering commentary upon commentaries, I reenact the predicaments of the book's characters whose mastery, not only of the texts they use, but of their understanding of the plots in which they are involved, are always provisional, haphazard, and subject to unforeseen interventions.

The novel endorses its status as a palimpsest, even against the sometimes overbearing authority of its narrator: the text, to use Barthes term, is "writerly," though, perhaps surprisingly, the text's calling-forth for active and plural constructions of meaning by its readers-as-(re)writers is as much a *result* of commercialization as it is to the resistance of commercialization. What better example of Barthes's declaration that: "Thus, what I enjoy in a narrative is not directly its content or even its structure, but rather the abrasions I impose upon its surface: I read on, I skip, I look up, I dip in again" (12). A little later, Barthes remarks: "not to devour, to gobble, but to graze, to browse scrupulously, to rediscover—in order to read today's writers—the leisure of bygone readings: to be *aristocratic* readers" (13). In *Joseph Andrews* the distinction between aristocratic readers, who have comprehensive and encyclopedic habits (a wealth of knowledge, a control of discourse) and middle-class readers, who rifle through a book since they are beholden to time and limited means and their own egoistic concerns, who forget and fudge and doodle in the margins, is distinctive, and ironically it is the middle-class "grazing," bovine or sheep-like as it may be, butchering the text against the grain, rather than adhering to the classical tradition of the aristocrat with his complete calf-bound sets, that triumphs. But it is also this "middle-class" style of reading that is a byproduct of the commercialization of texts. Fielding's novel pleads for its own undoing, a fragmentation and puzzling out: the episodes, chapters, digressions, set pieces and inset tales work to form a centrifuge. It is up to each reader to hold the text together—in my case, quite literally—or choose to take from it what he or she may. Supposedly faithful readers will find themselves as frustrated as Adams himself, bumbling along in world partly made up of their own projections.

Wolfgang Iser posits a phenomenology of the implied reader, claiming that Fielding sets up the reader's superiority to Adams, which puts the reader in the uncomfortable position of

seeming to identify with the opportunistic and hypocritical rogues: "the worldly-wise are lacking in morality, the moralist in self-awareness, and these two negative poles carry with them a virtual ideality against which the reader must measure himself" or herself (44). Thus, the reader must fill in the gap to create a suitable morality that somehow strikes a balance between these two rejected alternatives. In so far as Iser is making the point that there is no exemplary character in Fielding, unlike Richardson, and so the reader is left to construct a moral ideal from the various alternatives presented and dismissed for one reason or another, I can agree with him. However, Iser also states:

> The virtual dimension is brought about through forming the "gestalt" of the text; here we establish consistency between contrasting positions; this is the configurative meaning of the text, where the unformulated becomes concrete; and finally this is the point at which the text becomes an experience for the reader…. a convergence at a point somewhere between or even above these two poles. (42)

Iser makes clear that this point is not asymptotic—it is in the "virtual dimension" only because it is implied by the negative poles, and so must be constructed by the reader; but it must be a real point since, Iser says, it is where the "text becomes an experience for the reader." Iser never elucidates this point that he claims Fielding left implicit, at most speaking of "balance" and "convergence." Iser's claim of the "consistency between contrasting positions" is all too redolent of the supposed unity of the aesthetic object, which, in this case, Iser contends will issue in a coherent moral standpoint, one which, however, he is never able to explicate.

The unity or convergence Iser posits is an artifact of his methodology; so, too, is the moral standpoint that Iser thinks is the unity's byproduct in this case. If Iser never articulates what the moral standpoint of the novel is, even for him, I suspect it is because the experience of reading the text actually consists of ever-widening, incommensurable gaps that the reader is always grappling to close. Iser appears uncomfortable with the reader's subjectivity, which the novel amplifies, claiming that the reader "will leave behind his individual disposition for the duration of the reading" (56). On the contrary, to co-opt the sentimental metaphor of vibratory strings, the novel reverberates the reader's subjectivity, producing feedback effects that allow readers to overhear their own moral doubts, amplifying them while introducing difference to their moral wavelengths—not just making them recursively louder, but altering the frequency, punctuating the signal with breakdowns and outbreaks. How much are we supposed to delight in scenes of rape or ribaldry; how far are we supposed to identify with any of the novel's flawed characters? These questions are complex and result in different answers even for the same reader. Iser's two negative poles conveniently reduce the text to a binary, generalizing all the characters except Adams as having the same moral faults, as well as leaving out the important wormholes of the inset stories, which offer parallel universes that comment on the diegetic story while also escaping or challenging its terms by presenting an alternative moral dimension.

V. Interpolated Tales and the Dis-closure of a Moral

The interpolated tales explode the notion of a self-contained diegetic world with a coherent moral order; instead, they present alternative narrative universes that distort as much as they reflect the values of the main story, and thereby undo the tidy closure the novel appears to reach. While Varey states that "one effect of the novel's humor is… to bring the narrator and

the reader closer together" (34), Bryan Burns declares that Fielding "encourages the reader to choose what appeals to him or her from the rich assemblage of delights separately offered by separate chapters" (125). Emphasizing how the interpolated tales interrupt the main narrative, and are themselves interrupted in turn, thereby frustrating the reader and often upsetting expectations of order and closure, Burns writes that the narrator "suggests a parody of thoroughgoingness and consistency rather than a genuine striving after them" (121). The interpolations "tumble the reader disturbingly from one manner and perspective into another… encouraging us… to reconsider… the moral position of the work as a whole," he observes (127). Raising the question of the pointlessness of the interpolated tales *is*, in fact, one of their main points. The last tale of "The History of Two Friends" abruptly ends with the two so-called friends bickering with each other, interrupted by the extradiegetic event of Joseph giving Beau Didapper a box on the ears for groping Fanny, causing Little Dick Adams to leave off his reading, signaled by a dash (276), almost as if one quarrel spilled over into the next. Any reader who earnestly hoped for a tidy moral conclusion to this inset tale is confronted by a shaggy-dog story. The interpolated tales stand in an incongruous relationship to the main narrative; their use as allegories upon the action is always tentative. They are counter-stories that offer alternatives to the central story's significance, vortexes into other worldviews, and their import ultimately depends on each reader's interpretive work in finding ways to connect or disconnect them from the narrative thread. In this sense, *Joseph Andrews* is littered with what web developers call "Easter eggs," which—like colorful gifts hidden amid high grass—are small, inadvertent nodes where, if unbidden viewers click, they slip down an annotated rabbit-hole, warp-zone to secret levels, or are opened onto another window. The interpolated tales frustrate the reader in search of

easy correspondences between the didactic import of the inset stories and the main narrative action.

The narratives urge to digress and interrupt itself is not, in the end, controverted by its gestures toward closure. Bryan Burns locates a key tension in *Joseph Andrews*, which causes readers "to feel quizzical about the relationship between Fielding's wish to impute some general interpretation to his work, and his often contradictory delight in the vagary and singularity of human behavior" (121). Burns sees this as a "conflict, never entirely resolved," between the picaresque impulse to ramble on the open road of freewheeling narrative and the contravening tendency of the novel to impose structure and conclude by always evoking some ethical end (121). A similar tension may also manifest in the novel's traditional comic ending of marriage and, as Mark Spilka says, "the night adventures which serve as a kind of parody on the whole novel" (67). Spilka observes about the bed-swapping episode, which is sandwiched between the incest problem being raised and then resolved, that it "becomes obvious that some sort of emotional purgation has occurred and that the resolution of the main plot will be anticlimactic" (60). The episode comes almost as a carnivalesque eruption, turning topsy-turvy the novel's scenes of barely preserved chastity and beaten-back predatory lust. While it may seem the energy that the novel has sought to contain is released in this episode, the situation of Adams playing "musical beds" also inverts the moral order of the novel. In the climactic scene of slapstick, Adams pummels Slipslop, rather than chivalrously defending a woman from her brute attackers. Likewise, he blissfully sleeps next to Fanny, occupying the space that the villains have been conniving and clawing to obtain throughout the narrative.

Likewise, the true denouement has its trace of sexual liberty. Wilson's strawberry birthmark, which is discovered on Joseph, anoints him as both inherently aristocratic and as a

character who is coterminous with a fecund pastoral landscape, "as fine a strawberry as ever grew in a garden" (292); at the same time, the birthmark raises the specter of his father's venereal diseases, which such a blemish may resemble. In another sense, the ending sees the reversal of Parson Adams usual sanctimonious attitude, as he, "being filled with ale and pudding, had given loose to more facetiousness than was usual to him" (297). If the conclusion seems anticlimactic, I suspect, it is in part due to the plot giving-in, finally, to the force of the narrator's imposition, as he tidies all the loose ends, whereas the vibrancy of the novel derives largely from its invitation to resist and deconstruct the narrator's imposition of rational organization. The shaggy-dog story of the last inset tale, for example, suggests the narrator's artifice in seeking closure.

If the novel succumbs to being contained in the gridded matrix of its well-made plot, which has been apportioned into chapters and books on principles of both quantitative measurement and classical decorum, the *experience* of reading it is nonetheless insistently represented as messy and dependent on each reader's temperament. A brief glance at some of the chapter headings themselves, for example, shows that they declare, in various asides, an attitude of self-mockery:

> "In which, after some very fine writing, the history goes on…"
>
> "A very short chapter in which Parson Adams went a great way"
>
> "A chapter very full of learning"
>
> "Which some readers will think too short and others too long"
>
> "A discourse between a poet and a player; of no other use in this history, but to divert the reader"

"Of which you are desired to read no more than you like." (3-6)

Any regulatory imperative to have chapters of equal length and importance is openly flaunted. The chapter headings, which might otherwise act as the lines of a grid—a system through which one might look to discern correct perspective and proportion—efface the substantive value of their own demarcations, leaving us dizzy and disoriented instead, confronting our own subjectivity.

The three long interpolated tales in the novel function to interrogate the transmission and reception of narrative itself, in order to force readers to redefine their position, whether trusting or skeptical, whether inside or outside the circle of the narrator's confidence. In the tale of "The Unfortunate Jilt," the indulgent third-person narrator presents a conventional love story while fending off Parson Adams's often misleading curiosity about details, the prudish censoriousness of Miss Grave-airs, and the constant interruptions of the stage-coach journey. The reader can see the faults of interlocutors who are either too eager for extraneous details or too repressive of essential ones—and hence, the tale's metanarrative suggestion is to appreciate the skill of the well-bred narrator, who gently yet efficiently steers the story toward its destination. In the second inset tale, Mr. Wilson's biographical backstory presents a very different case: an unreliable first-person narrative. His tale fits the eighteenth-century cliché of the reformed rake; however, the loutish behavior that Mr. Wilson repeatedly indulges in casts doubt on his own testimony. The reader, therefore, is implicitly urged to take a more distant and suspicious attitude toward narrators, trained to look for signs within the story's construction that may undermine its claims to veracity. The last interpolated story, Little Dick Adam's reading of "The History of Two Friends," takes the form of a twice-told tale. The young, relatively unskilled reader relates the

tale to an older, more knowledgeable audience. When corrected erroneously, the child appeals to the authority of the text. The first tale is based on hearsay or invention, though gracious manners give authority to the teller; the second tale is exculpatory autobiography, wherein the narrator lacks the proper distance to evaluate his materials; the third tale relies on an adherence to a written text and a community that negotiates the applicable conventions of reading. The ambiguity of each narrator's authority corresponds to a degree with uncertainties about their class status, whether they are a social climber, a fallen gentleman, or a child outside adult's social hierarchy. Each tale can be viewed as a parable about the act of reading, interrupting the main discourse to readjust our critical faculties and thereby our regard for the import of the novel as a whole.

Of course, these inset tales reflect back upon the ways that actual readers manipulate the text and, whether as sympathetic or resistant readers, they feel enclosed in or pushed outside the moral lines the novel appears to draw. Yet, by positioning us on unsteady ground, the novel constantly changes our perception of the demarcation of those moral boundaries, as well. Joseph F. Bartoloemo writes that:

> the pursuit of narrative authority in the three tales, however crudely represented, anatomizes Fielding's own practice. His rhetorical maneuvering to endow his text with various kinds and levels of truthfulness leads him to adopt different and often contradictory poses. (408)

Bartolomeo views Adams as a foil rather than a surrogate to the actual reader, albeit one who is a "self-styled wise interpreter" yet nonetheless "repeatedly struts his classical learning and

superior judgment only to reveal amusing shortcomings" (411). "Unlike Adams," Bartolomeo observes, "we… consciously choose to stop reading in order to evaluate, to question, and to reread" (409). Thus, any actual reader must confront the text for herself, creating a meaning that is opposed to both Adams's pedantic idealism, the sophisticated yet often immoral insinuations of those surrounding him, and the urbane narrator whose pushy heavy-hand often wears a deceptively velvet glove. The narrator, after all, admits to getting the story through hearsay from Joseph and in letters from Mr. Wilson (298). The narrator foregrounds his own construction of the plot, inviting his readers to question the imposition of his didactic commentary.

The vision of *Joseph Andrews* comprehends the human comedy as a maelstrom of misprisions, reinterpretations, redactions, and serendipitous misunderstandings. Though the errancy of its characters is corrected by their ultimate arrival at a retired, married life in a stable country home, the closure seems foisted on and cannot entirely belie the endlessness of hermeneutic wrangling—whether the reader's wriggling or the narrator's rigging—that is hypostasized in the ever-proliferating intertextual body of the narrative. The solution to the novel's conflict is prompted by the chance intervention of a pedlar who was "formerly a gentleman" (279), a mediating figure whose ambiguous class status allows him to act as a go-between. The coincidental visit by the pedlar brings up the problem of the potential incest between Fanny and Joseph, though the solution to this problem later circuitously leads to the revelation of Joseph's parentage and the resolution. The pedlar's story is thought to be truthful by Mr. Booby since "there were so many strong circumstances to induce their credit, so he could not perceive any interest the pedlar could have on inventing it, or endeavoring to impose such a falsehood on them" (284). Of course, the pedlar's story leaves out crucial details—Joseph is not really related to the Andrews. Although the pedlar's sincerity is not necessarily suspect, he

unwittingly tells a half-truth. That the informant should be a pedlar speaks once again to the self-conscious role that commodification takes in the text; likewise, the pedlar acts as a double of Wilson, another gentleman who has fallen in class to that of a merchant and is similarly a questionable storyteller. Mr. Booby's avowal of the pedlar's "credit" links the pedaling of stories to commercial transactions, and alerts readers that they should be wary of squaring his account.

This same distrust of narrators who have something to gain from the stories they retail is evidenced in the final sentence of the novel, which concludes that "Joseph… will [not] be prevailed on by any booksellers, or their authors, to make his appearance in 'high life'" (298). Though the novel can be understood as a sequel to *Pamela*, taking advantage of that prior text's commercial popularity, *Joseph Andrews* forecloses the possibility of more textual matter continuing the story of its protagonists. In this way, the novel draws attention to its status as a commodity even as it pretends to deny any mercantile interest in the book trade or profit-motive of its eponymous character and, by extension, its actual author. Such a stance ironically evokes suspicion, however, as the apparently definitive gesture of closure highlights the way the text operates in the marketplace. For readers ineluctably caught up in the flux of commerce, this supposedly closing gesture once again re-opens questions about the charity of their interpretations and their faithfulness to the text and characters. Readers are made aware not only that they are reading a book but also that the materiality of the very book in their hands always bears filiations to other texts and economies of value, the boundaries of which can potentially be enlarged or diminished by their own transactions.

The Radically Unreliable Narrator and "A Groce of Green Spectacles": Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield*

A long-standing debate divides Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield* into various sentimental and satiric interpretations, though nearly all critics agree that there are disjunctions and discrepancies in the text. Instead of attempting to smooth out these disjunctions, I recognize such moments as thoroughgoing and integral to the novel. The vicar is a radically unreliable narrator, and the reader does not have a stable system of values or facts by which to reconcile the vicar's judgments as erroneous against any implied objective viewpoint. Furthermore, the vicar's two doubles, Jenkinson and Sir William Thornhill, both offer figures of ambiguous moral standing; such ambiguity foregrounds the reader's role in needing to actively create an epistemological and ethical framework by which to judge events and characters. The concept of character is often represented as theatrical, an artifact that changes with one's sumptuary and social role-playing. This notion challenges satiric and sentimental understandings since both those viewpoints depend on essentializing a difference between a surface and a stable, underlying reality. The constant reversals in the plot and the farcical ending, by contrast, point out a bottomless performance. I suggest that many critics have been reluctant to acknowledge this aspect of the novel because it threatens to undo the same surface/depth assumption in traditional interpretational models, and it reveals the possibility of a text that not only is various rather than unified but is also potentially capable of changing them.

I. The Schism in *The Vicar*'s Critical Reception

The Vicar of Wakefield (1766) presents a considerable interpretational challenge; the novel, like many of the characters in it, possesses a deceptive simplicity. On the one hand, there is a substantial critical outlook that understands Goldsmith's vicar as a sympathetic if somewhat

fallible paragon within a sentimental novel that celebrates pastoral innocence in an otherwise corrupt, commercial world. On the other hand, there has been an enduring oppositional view, significantly revitalized by mid-twentieth-century New Critical methodology but implicit in the novel's earliest reception, that *The Vicar* is primarily satiric, and, however genial its main characters may appear, the comic import of the novel derives largely from mocking their vanity or naiveté. The first interpretation sees the vicar's faith in the face of recurrent calamities modeled on the pious tribulations of Job; the second interpretation sees Primrose's confidence in providential benevolence more akin to the overly optimistic folly of a Panglossian theodicy. Moreover, little middle-ground has been found between these viewpoints since it is generally assumed that to emphasize the "sentimental" nature of the reader's empathy or identification with the well-meaning vicar and his family's sufferings would thereby preclude a satiric detachment in which the reader distances the benighted Primroses from his or her own more sophisticated knowingness about the vain tricks and disguised viciousness that abound in society. The reader is expected either to cry along with the Primroses as they weather their fatal losses or to laugh at their simplicity—and, perhaps, the simplicity of the romance models they are drawn from—as they are repeatedly duped in their hypocritical efforts at social-climbing.

This interpretational schism in the text has even led some critics, such as Quintana, Kirk, and Baldridge, to declare that the book abruptly changes course somewhere midway. Cates Baldridge claims that Goldsmith unsuccessfully seeks to contain the irony that the first half of the novel levels against the vicar's viewpoint: for Baldridge, the vicar seems to radically change from a figure of satire to one of moral authority. "This moral transformation," Baldridge writes, "takes the form of a desperate leap rather than an incremental progression," revealing "contradictions between the formal structure of the novel… and an authorial desire to reproduce

hegemonic discourses" (19-20). Yet, this interpretation disregards the changes and ambiguities prevalent in the vicar as well as many other characters throughout. It also attributes an intention to Goldsmith of "reproducing hegemonic discourses," without attending to the ways that those discourses are regularly juxtaposed and undermined. The structure of the novel—with its inset tales and poems, cruxes, reversals, and diversity of modes—emphatically destabilizes anything that approaches the status of a hegemonic discourse. The novel's many leaps highlight rather than conceal its narrative gaps and improbable plot structure, the alterations in its characters, and its many shifts of genre and tone.

Clara M. Kirk argues that Goldmsith's "intention—whatever it was—shifted in the lapse of time between his writing of the first third of the novel and the hasty completion of the manuscript" (108), noting a different locus than Baldridge where an abrupt and decisive change occurs. Moreover, Kirk acknowledges that "just as he [Goldsmith] could consider the character of his father, his brother, and other members of his family, including his own, as amusing, charming, satiric, and even tragic, so does he regard the story of the Primrose family" (114). Even when Goldsmith appears to be using a character as a mouthpiece for ideas he has promulgated in other contexts, then, we do not necessarily need to interpret these episodes as forthright or privilege them as the controlling values by which to judge other characters' actions, though Kirk herself argues otherwise. The fact that Baldridge and Kirk both discover different abrupt turning points in the novel where it transforms from a satire of the vicar to a sentimental novel portraying him as a paragon indicates, rather, that the novel vacillates between these viewpoints repeatedly.

Even among mid-century New Critics who see the novel as mainly satiric, there is often large disagreement. W. O. S. Sutherland goes so far as to state, "It is important, though perhaps

no longer necessary, to say that *The Vicar of Wakefield* is not a sentimental novel" (84). Yet, Sutherland feels that Goldsmith "makes ambiguous the degree to which the Vicar is satirized" and "shifts his satiric object during the course of the book" (84). Sutherland nevertheless proclaims that "though the reader may disapprove, he [sic] is still sympathetic" to the vicar because the vicar "is a victim of his lack of knowledge of men not his own virtue…. The reader who does not make a distinction at this point between virtue and bad judgment loses Goldsmith's creation" (85-86). Thus, the reader, satirically recognizing the vicar's poor judgment but still respecting his moral rectitude, may be moved to attitudes of "condescension, pity, or even compassion" (91). Sutherland himself seems most inclined to condescension since he remarks "it is small comfort to win the game if one doesn't know the score…. it must be said not many men want such virtues" (84). How much the vicar's virtues can redeem his lapses in judgment, then, remains an open question.

So, too, is whether the vicar is a virtuous character at all. Like Sutherland, Robert H. Hopkins emphatically rules out interpretations of the text as a sentimental novel: "No critic can maintain that *The Vicar* is a sentimental novel without also recognizing that it is an artistic failure" (224). However, Hopkins argues at length that the vicar not only exercises bad judgment but actively shapes the narrative to "omit certain facts that reflect unfavorably on his self-image of his character" while also "exaggerating his ancestry" and other details, which, the vicar erroneously presumes, will show him in a better light (178-179). Furthermore, Hopkins views the vicar as fundamentally hypocritical, (209) condemned by his own judgment that, "There is no character more contemptible than a man that is a fortune hunter" (29). Hopkins amasses such evidence as the vicar's backsliding when he retroactively changes a gift to Burchell into a loan, the vicar's compromised position in opening a letter intended for another, the vicar's

considerable dowry for marrying his daughters to wealthy landowners versus the pittance he gives his son George, and the vicar's "final attitude toward benevolence… [as] a good business investment," (189) because it accrues interest, self-esteem, or influence in this life or because of the dividends it pays in the next. Hopkins's examination of the vicar's faults adds up to rendering the vicar's moral authority questionable and making the novel appear a satire of its narrator.

Yet, for all Hopkins's persuasive analysis, he is too dismissive of other points of view, baldly claiming that "readers have been misinterpreting *The Vicar of Wakefield* for over 175 years" (229) and that "the surface level itself [of the sentimental, Job-like story] is best understood as a trap for the naïve reader who responds only to literature that appears to reflect his own sentimental attitudes" (208). One might equally respond that *The Vicar*'s contradictions and ambiguities are a "trap" to reflect the self-importance of some readers' satiric worldviews. The emphasis on one type of reading does not necessarily discount another—in fact, the novel keeps pivoting its readers between points of view so that both satiric and sentimental responses are available but also called into questioned. Hopkins's argument, while revealing hitherto overlooked aspects of the text, is thus extremely one-sided.

George Haggerty observes that "truth itself becomes a shifting and deceptive concept in this novel" (28). Private and public, self and other, emotion and reason, happiness and misery, virtue and vice all seem to collapse and render their distinctions moot; as Haggerty says, "For truth seems always to recede and meaning to evaporate" (29). Olivia's "honesty" as a woman, for example, rests on a technical oversight; Jenkinson and Squire Thornhill are changed from scoundrels into harmless comic figures; and the vicar's confidence in the dictum of the psalmist that the righteous man will not be forsaken, so long mocked throughout the novel, is at last improbably redeemed. "What is being satirized is the very expectation that happiness is within

the Vicar's power," Haggerty claims (36), concluding that the novel "renders this seemingly self-contradictory stance unequivocally" (37). Yet, this may be too nihilistic an outlook on the novel, given that the reader *can* often see through the ruses to which the vicar falls prey; the plot's reversals of fortune themselves become predictable; and even the ending, with Burchell transforming into Sir William Thornhill, has been anticipated by several hints to the astute reader. While Haggerty's interpretation seems partially justified, the novel nonetheless teases us that meaning is possible, judgments are important, and morality has something to do with the good life. Haggerty's stance is therefore too definitively amoral; the novel equivocates on all levels in order to evaporate ready-made distinctions, yet, in doing so, it asks its readers to reconstruct narrative, affective, and moral distinctions of their own.

Almost all readers, regardless of their critical persuasion, have attempted to discover a fixed outlook on the text while largely dismissing anomalous episodes and seeming inconsistencies; or, as is prominent currently among interpretations of the novel, they account for these gaps by declaring that they reveal an ideology's troubling assumptions that the text attempts to elide—discontinuities between its professed intent and the cultural values that it actually expresses. To locate the intent of the novel in this way, though, often requires the critic's own assumption that it offers a narrative with a stable discourse and operates with a set of values that become legible once one understands its ideological investments: this method splits the text into a static surface and depth. The novel, however, is not fixed, but rather it is in continual flux. At least three types of changes occur throughout the text: (1) the characters reform, reveal themselves as another, perform distinct roles, take on different humors depending on their clothes or circumstance, or slide into their opposite character types; (2) the styles and discourses employed by the novel vary between pastoral, sermon, fable, fairy tale, romance, picaresque,

farce, ballad, satire, homiletic, allegory, and novelistic realism; (3) and, perhaps most importantly, the values by which the reader is asked to judge the characters and events in the narrative shift at several points, offering contrasting viewpoints and even collapsing distinctions between them. The upshot of this internal difference is a kaleidoscopic perspectivalism, in which locating the reader's blind spots is also a process of the text's ability to make meaning.

II. Radically Unreliable Narrators

Attempting to find common ground between the usual critical interpretations reveals the inadequacy of traditionally antagonistic conceptions of satiric and sentimental responses. For not only is the novel fractured between an array of points of view, the novel also shows how these different perspectives are mutually constitutive and implicated. Conventionally, in order to establish the unreliability of a narrator, for example, we must nonetheless approach some incidents as given and reliable, such as direct dialogue or the facts the narrator portrays as opposed to claims made for their significance, taking these points as evidence that reveal the narrator's fallibility. The more radical unreliability of the vicar, however, often leaves us at a loss to account for incongruities and discrepancies: the facts themselves can appear concocted while their significance is disputable. There is no stable, implied authority—safely outside the narrative frame—against which to measure the vicar's representation of events. Rather, the choice of which parts of the narrative to privilege is not encoded into the narrative itself, but thrust upon the reader who is left to choose among competing and frequently contradictory claims. Michael M. Boardman is somewhat typical when he declares that "*The Vicar of Wakefield* may be most interesting because it shows how the structure of the early comic novel may be warped by radically incommensurable beliefs struggling to achieve expression," yet he takes this as an

aesthetic fault since he claims, "Goldsmith loses control of his chief formal innovation in the novel, the dual voice that allows the Vicar to be a genial dunce and a comic hero in short succession" (67). Boardman, while recognizing the radical juxtaposition of perspectives in the novel, nonetheless hopes to discover how these viewpoints are subordinated to a synoptic outlook of an implied author in an ironic way: he attempts to read Goldsmith as offering a conventionally rather than a radically unreliable narrator. Boardman wants to interpret Goldsmith's vicar in the more standard manner Wayne Booth proposes for establishing unreliable narrators, believing the implied author provides a rhetorical structure by which we can distinguish a novel's values despite—or, one might even say, *because of*—its unreliable narrator, discerning that many of the narrator's evaluations, but not certain basic facts, are to be regarded as distorted. Yet this approach is a backformation of critical procedure since many of the techniques that give us clues as to the degree of unreliability of the narrator have only become fully conventionalized since Goldsmith's novel.

Readers may be inclined to emphasize those episodes that reinforce their own perspectives; yet, the mixture of sentimental and satirical modes within the novel functions to complicate and perhaps short-circuit the reader's tendency to project. As a radically unreliable narrator, the vicar can be seen as both a simpleton *and* a benevolent patriarch: the contradictions between these roles do not need to be resolved to ultimately privilege one view. In much the same way, for example, R. K. Narayan's narrator in *The Guide* can be viewed as a prophet and a charlatan, a compromised businessman as well as an earnest if involuntary spiritual leader of his community. To offer another example of what I mean by a radically unreliable narrator, one could examine the first-person voices that tell "how it is" in Beckett's novels. The terms of consciousness and narrative are upended by the haunting sense not only that the voice might be

speaking from beyond the grave, or can slip into other minds, but by the hallucinatory quality of the monologues that render material facts themselves as disembodied and so unverifiable according to ratiocinative, empirical terms. All we are left with is the voice questioning itself, a voice which has become uneasily our own through the experience of ventriloquizing it in our reading. The theatrical dissimulation subjecting the vicar's world to constant reversals coupled with his own deluded perception creates a similarly skeptical narrative. Like Beckett's ventriloquized narrators, the vicar is also a *vicarious* placeholder, a fungible substitute or a term of exchange through which our sympathy for him may turn into skepticism towards our own values and subject positions.

Fundamentally, as most critics acknowledge, the vicar seems composed of various attitudes. As much as he might be a stickler about monogamy, on other issues he is willfully lax: for example, he allows his girls to get their fortune told by a traveling gypsy because, ironically, "I was tired of always being wise," he declares (49). D. W. Jefferson remarks that "eighteenth-century characters in the comic tradition are creations of artifice and rhetoric, sometimes shifting from one idiom to another, revealing not only a different side of character but also a change of persona" (25). While this is true to a degree, the shifts of character seem more pronounced and emphasized in *The Vicar*. The instability and performance of character is one of the novel's major topoi. Jefferson, however, declares that, "Such questions as 'How naïve is the vicar?' are not invited" (27). That seems patently wrong—the vicar is duped, deluded, and deceived throughout. Even if Goldsmith never intended this question of the vicar's naiveté to be raised, the reception of the novel has proven that such a question is a vibrant and fruitful one for trying to understand the import of the text. The vicar's skewed perception is demonstrated when he opposes Sophia's interest in Burchell as beneath their family's dignity whereas Olivia's flirtation

with Thornhill is countermanded as contemptible "fortune-hunting" (29). His exhortations are ineffectual in both cases. In his rhetoric, wealth and poverty are often dismissed as inconsequential compared to intrinsic merit, faith, and love—though the terms of the vicar's rhetoric are often couched in commercial language: "treasures," "credit," "industry" and "repaid," for example, are terms he often employs. Furthermore, despite his lectures to the contrary, his actions show him concerned with marrying his daughters to those with a higher station.

Beyond these types of ironies, though, the text questions the reliability of the vicar's narrative. Near the beginning, the vicar brags of his prowess as a preacher, claiming that "there were three strange wants at Wakefield, a parson wanting pride, young men wanting wives, and ale-houses wanting customers" (13). The vicar would have us believe that he performed his pastoral duties so well as to rid the town of young men who drink and debauch; this boast appears due to his own misplaced pride, given his mentioning that "the 'Squire would sometimes fall asleep in the most pathetic parts of my sermon," a personage whom we know debauches (11). Moreover, the vicar's tract on monogamy "never sold" (13), a fact hard to square with his professed success at sermonizing. The vicar is initially presented as a quixotic figure, deluded that he is an effective leader of the community when he cannot even control his own family, hung up on the pedantic hobbyhorse of his theory of monogamy, and foolishly over-charitable everywhere except at home. The difficulty in discerning which of the vicar's facts to accept becomes most pronounced during the prison scenes that precede the farcical climax. The radical unreliability of the vicar causes us not only to eliminate any implied narrative framework that refers to extradiegetic or objective values that would allow us to definitively locate those points

at which the vicar is deceived and where he may be trying to deceive us, his radical unreliability as a narrator also makes us question the basic facts and events recounted in his narrative.

Such a radically unreliable stance, in fact, is hinted from the very first words we encounter: "The Vicar of Wakefield: A Tale Supposed to Be Written by Himself" (iii). Like the Biblical Moses supposedly recounting his own death, the title provides us with an impossibly dual narrative perspective: the vicar who supposedly wrote the text in the first person and some unnamed editorial voice that comments in the third person. If we suppose the vicar did write the tale, what do we do with the subtitle? If we suppose the editorial voice covertly in control, why would that voice invalidate the very claim it seems to make? Again, something must be wrong here—but there is no determinate evidence to decide the truth. Both perspectives offer clues to different readings of the text, whether we believe the vicar the authentic (and perhaps sincere but bungling) first-person author or whether we view this as evidence of a crafty editorial manipulator ventriloquizing and fabricating the vicar's voice.

III. The Vicar's Deceptive Doubles

The different sides of Dr. Primrose are reflected in his two doubles, Jenkinson and Sir William Thornhill. Jenkinson masquerades as a pedantic preacher only to be revealed as a swindler. Sir William, by contrast, disguises himself as a homely and seemingly benighted hanger-on, Burchell, only to later transform into the commanding, all-seeing sovereign figure of the novel's conclusion. Yet, the distinction between these homological types appears to collapse when examined more closely. Jenkinson is depicted as undergoing an unlikely reformation in prison. Burchell, who initially represents Sir William as a prodigal, is nevertheless more innocent at heart than his suspiciously imperious, artfully deceptive alter ego. The vicar may be

characterized as partaking of all these traits, both benevolent and duplicitous. Moreover, the very "unmasking" of Burchell and Jenkinson paradoxically divulges their theatricalized identities: just when the story appears to have uncovered some deeper truth about these characters, we realize we may only be encountering another pose. Jenkinson's self-proclaimed reform may be a ruse whereas Sir William's distribution of rewards at the end can be understood as his most self-serving contrivance. Then again, it is possible that both characters are redeemed by their innate moral goodness, Jenkinson saved by his penitence and Sir William saving others through his majestic charity. The vicar, too, repeatedly stages himself, indelibly aware of the roles he is playing even when he is ironically ignorant of the unsuitability of that role to his situation.

The reader who laughs at the vicar as a naïve simpleton—someone who might even deserve to be taken advantage of in the marketplace given his hypocritical desire to get ahead in it—is then put in the awkward position of advocating suspicion, even a harmful paranoia, by Jenkinson's comment that:

> Those relations which describe the tricks and vices only of mankind, by increasing our suspicion of life, retard our success. The traveler that distrusts every person he meets, and turns back upon the appearance of every man who looks like a robber, seldom arrives in time at his journey's end. (146)

Jenkinson's remark attacks potential satirists, and by extension the reader who takes the satiric stance, for inculcating distrust in society. A fundamental level of trust is necessary for the mutual getting along and going about of business—eighteenth-century travelers who turn into agoraphobic shut-ins through an overanxious dread of highwaymen are paralyzed by their

skepticism. How can the reader mock trust when a healthy modicum of presumed goodwill is a prerequisite for a functional society?

And yet, Jenkinson not only looks like a robber, he *is* a robber. He has previously duped Primrose with a false draft of money upon his neighbor as well as duping Primrose's son George with the worthless green spectacles. Hence, the dramatic irony of his speech is that this incorrigible liar is counseling honesty by refusing to countenance his own dastardly deeds, perhaps in an attempt to swindle his interlocutors once more. The judicious—and not only the satiric-minded—reader has good reason to be skeptical of Jenkinson at this point. Of course, the narrative seems to upset this expectation: just when we think we see Jenkinson about to hoodwink the vicar yet again, Jenkinson demonstrates that he is reformed by helping the vicar recover his fortune and reputation, and is even rewarded by Sir William with a modest stipend at the novel's conclusion (186). In spite of this evidence, the narrative could be read as unreliable, tainted by the rose-colored glasses of that "green" bumpkin, Primrose. Previous to his seemingly helpful behavior, Jenkinson had been interrupted in his cosmological monologue, a set piece he uses to feign learning and piety, by which he is recognized by the vicar (140). Jenkinson can thus still be viewed as an opportunist who changes his allegiance as his interest demands, a reading that is reinforced by Jenkinson's admission that he managed to get a real priest and license for the would-be sham-marriage designed by Thornhill not because of any honest motives but because he planned to later blackmail his boss (183). Jenkinson can be understood as both a reformed prodigal and a predatory rouge, depending on the perspective the reader takes: the satiric view undercuts his supposed virtue and vice versa.

Whereas Jenkinson impersonates a reverend as a confidence trick, and thereby acts as a potentially satirical shadow-figure to the vicar, Sir William is the vicar's doppelgänger in so far

as he represents the novel's benevolent patriarch and generous statesman, the ideal which the more fallible vicar emulates and aspires toward. In fact, the story Sir William tells about himself early in the novel seems to presage the vicar's own narrative: "he loved all mankind" almost to a fault, so that he lost his fortune to a "crowd of dependents" (21), but, after much wandering, he learned a more "rational and moderate" bounty whereupon "his circumstances [became] more affluent than ever" (22). Under the guise of Burchell, Sir William describes his own former malady (and the vicar's parallel fault) by comparing it to a "disease in which the whole body is so exquisitely sensible, that the slightest touch gives pain: what some have suffered in their persons, this gentleman felt in his mind" (21). The younger Sir William—like the vicar presently—was a "soft touch," a man of too much feeling who lent his mercy, as well as his money, to those unworthy of it, thereby losing his fortune to hoaxes and hangers-on. Sir William remarks that this situation "merited reproaches and contempt" (21). If Burchell condemns himself in the guise of the younger Sir William, then he also implicitly condemns the vicar for the same moral failing.

The vicar, after all, is so excessive in his benevolence when the novel begins as to let "cousins, even to the fortieth remove"—i.e., complete strangers, especially as they did not require help "from the Herald's office" to know their relationship—borrow "a riding coat, or a pair of boots, or sometimes a horse of small value" (9). The vicar says of the borrowers, "I always had the satisfaction to find he never came back to return them" (10). Yet, when the vicar's own first-born son sets out for the town, the vicar can only provide him with a kiss, five guineas, and a staff in place of a steed—that is, a duncical hobbyhorse rather than a real horse (17). Like the pilgrimage described in Burchell's tale, the vicar's fate has completely turned around by the end of the novel, though one may wonder if the vicar has learned to be more

prudent in his giving or whether a series of fantastic coincidences have intervened to serendipitously rescue him. In Sir William's initial encounter with the vicar, the former's tale of his life's journey foreshadows the latter's eventual triumph. In the moment, though, Sir William's story can be interpreted as a form of indirect advice for the vicar, admonishing the vicar's excessive generosity, which might soon leave him destitute.

Nonetheless, Sir William is not the straightforward moral arbiter of the novel. He also engages in deception since he passes himself off as the poor and ostensibly ignorant Mr. Burchell. Burchell's rags-to-riches story about Sir William, in a different light, can be seen as a "humble-brag" about his own rise to social prominence, ethical enlightenment, and communal largess. During this story, Sir William is quick to catch himself from slipping into the first person, saying "I now found, that—that—I forget what I was going to observe" (22) before continuing in the third person again. The slip, however, also helps gloss over a turning point in Sir William's biography, the moment of self-improvement that allowed Sir William to go from pauper to peer. Ironically, then, Sir William almost unmasks himself even as he covers up a suspicious lacunae in his own life story. The lacunae should be conspicuous since it hurries over the way that Sir William arrived at his current fortune from being a derelict, "philosophical" vagabond who had been overgenerous with his wealth. If Sir William's story foreshadows the vicar's own, the sudden rise in fortune that Sir William somehow experienced parallels the turning point of Sir William's own intervention into the vicar's affairs at the novel's denouement, which allows the vicar to rise in fortune. Whereas Sir William neglects to mention the cause of his transformation from a circumstantial drifter to a director of circumstances, Sir William's swooping-in at the novel's conclusion also eludes the vicar's own need for genuine financial and moral self-improvement, enabling the vicar's fortunes to likewise suddenly rise.

Furthermore, Sir William's subsequent visits to the Primroses under the alias of Mr. Burchell are not as disinterested as they initially seem since it becomes increasingly obvious that Sir William is courting Sophia. At several points the vicar suspects Mr. Burchell of betraying the family's interests, such as when Mr. Burchell repeats "Fudge" while the vicar's girls try to secure a recommendation to accompany the ladies to town (55-57), or when the vicar intercepts the letter intended for the neighboring ladies, interpreting the letter as an insult to his own daughters (72-73). By contrast, the alternating chapters depict how the hapless vicar does not suspect villains such as Squire Thornhill or Jenkinson enough. Nevertheless, Mr. Burchell's crying "Fudge" while calling out the lies of the whores who masquerade as town ladies also recalls his own fudged identity and social forgery. Similarly, the letter that Mr. Buchell "accidentally" drops could well have been planted, intentionally coded with double meanings, especially considering Sir William's designs upon Sophia. The vicar observes that Mr. Burchell "would prevent my girls from going to town, that he may have the pleasure of my youngest daughter's company here at home" (65). While the reader may think that Mr. Burchell's motives are in protecting the vicar's daughters, the vicar's observation is potentially accurate. The novel goes to some lengths to validate Sir William's charity and good nature: it slants our reading of his aim as keeping the Primrose daughters from town in order to prevent the certain ruin they would find there since he knows the sophisticated town ladies are really no more than gussied-up whores. However, this does not entirely discount the vicar's observation that Sir William's ulterior motive is to court Sophia for himself by keeping her nearby. Sir William's good intentions become especially dubious when considering that he has been abetting his nephew, Squire Thornhill, who eventually seduces Olivia, allowing the rake to share in his financial bounty and implicitly condoning his scandalous behavior.

Given Burchell's questionable motives, then, it may not be so far-fetched to see it as less than coincidental that Mr. Burchell is nearby when Sophia calls for help from the post-chaise into which she is abducted. It is possible that Mr. Burchell had been meeting Sophia in secret rendezvous all along, which would explain why he happened to be close by Sophia at this time. Alternatively, it is possible that the whole story of his heroic defeat of Sophia's abductor had been concocted—it seems quite preposterous that he could "come running up by the side of the horses, and with one blow knock the postilion to the ground" or that "running up, [he] shivered his [the ruffian's] sword to pieces" (167). In other words, the incident of the abduction may be a convenient cover story to make Mr. Burchell look more gallant and quiet suspicions of Sophia's liaison with him.

That they were, in fact, engaged in a liaison seems suggested by the vicar's earlier remarks, "I could perceive that Sophia in fright had thrown herself into Mr. Burchell's arms for protection" (44). Sophia seizes the opportunity of the gunshot at a picnic to fling herself into Burchell's arms, indicating that she has an intimate familiarity with him, an action which the ill-informed vicar excuses as due to her fright. Likewise, a reader may notice the tête-à-tête that occurs between Burchell and Sophia even earlier in their acquaintance, for instance, when the vicar notices them together in the field entering into "close conversation," but dismisses this as possible courtship since he "was too well convinced of her ambition, to be under any uneasiness from a man of broken fortune" (31). Not only does this reveal the vicar's class prejudices, it also shows him unwittingly permissive of what may really be going on between the two.

At the conclusion, Sir William artfully delays his proposal to Sophia, appearing to make her wait in suspense while all the other characters receive their supposedly just dispensations. In fact, he falsely offers Sophia to Jenkinson first, claiming to the vicar that "You are sensible… of

the obligations we owe Mr. Jenkinson. And it is just we should both reward him for it" (185). Sir William may be speaking ironically, however, since he might suspect Jenkinson is still a scoundrel, and any thanks the family owes him is merely accidental. Sophia's repulsion at the match may hint at Jenkinson's ambivalent moral reform, as well, though her remark that "I'd sooner die first" feels slightly facetious in the context of her sister Olivia's recently feigned death. Nonetheless, Sir William then says:

> 'If that be the case then,' cried he, 'if you will not have him—I think I must have you myself.' And so saying, he caught her by the breast with ardour. 'My loveliest, my most sensible of girls,' cried he, 'how could you ever think your own Burchell could deceive you, or that Sir William Thornhill could ever cease to admire a mistress that loved him for himself alone?' (185-186)

Impetuously catching Sophia by the breasts again indicates that they may have had more familiarity previously than either of them had let on. The skeptical reader may wonder whether Sophia is the sensible and wise girl Sir William applauds her for being or whether she is sophistical and worldly, disguising their clandestine relations. Tellingly, Sir William praises her for loving "himself alone" in the same breath that he reaffirms a destabilizing schism between his identities as Burchell and Sir William. Of course, on one level, Burchell *did* deceive her since he was really Sir William. Moreover, it was never Sir William Thornhill she loved as "himself," but the character of Burchell that he acted—unless, perhaps, Sir William secretly gave away his disguise at some prior point while courting her. Thus, even the apparently most stable characters in the novel, Sophia and Sir William, reveal themselves as two-sided, and possibly two-faced,

tricksters skilled in legerdemain. Even at the moment when their sentimental identification with each other seems most beyond disguise or deception, the specter of their double nature is raised.

The vicar has two authority figures that act as his doubles, the false preacher Jenkinson and the worldly political leader Sir William Thornhill. Both of these figures are ambiguous. Jenkinson may or may not have actually reformed at novel's end. Moreover, his encounters with the vicar in the marketplace and the prison indicate that the vicar shares more with him than he would like to admit. Sir William, while seeming a benevolent patriarch, has used a secret identity to court one of the vicar's daughters; his actions can be regarded as self-interested and far less virtuous than they may first appear, especially as he dispenses justice in his own favor. These two doubles indicate the mixed and mercurial quality of the vicar's own unsettled, morally ambiguous nature.

IV. The Theatricalization of Character

Joseph Roach details how the theory of acting was undergoing a crisis—what he describes as a Kuhnian paradigm shift—precisely at this moment in the mid-eighteenth century. On the one hand, older models of the rhapsode and the rhetor divinely inspired with pneumatic spirits or enthusiastic chains of magnetism were slowly replaced by an anatomically different view, brought about by such scientists as Harvey and Newton. The newer sciences indicated that the sensibility worked by vibrations in the fibers of the nerves, which operated like acoustical strings. In this view, the corporeal resonance of the actor's body, at times literally shaking with grief or anger, could cause a sympathetic response in the nerve-strings that tugged at an audience member's heartstrings. Opposed to this newer development, on the other hand, was a radically different view, brought about by Garrick's salon performances of rapidly changing affects and

chiefly promulgated by Diderot, which argued that actors did not need to feel the emotions that they depicted. Roach states that, "as the contradictory and incomplete theories of the mid-eighteenth century suggest, a satisfactory alternative explanation of the player's passion had yet to emerge [before Diderot], but the problem of spontaneity and sincerity as opposed to calculation and artifice had entered into a new and crucial stage of contention" (114). Theatre professionals knew that critics' and audiences' commendations of the "naturalness" of an actor's performance belied a great deal of rehearsal: a yet unresolved question, though, was whether rehearsal helped to fine-tune the pitch of the nerves and inner tremors of the bodily mechanism or whether rehearsal helped evacuate emotion from the performer so that the body developed muscle memory, affecting passion independently from its habitual responses and inner feelings. Would actors who were actually in love play their romantic roles better or should actors be divorced entirely from their stage personas, the minutest facial muscles trained to act on cue through rehearsed, automatic processes? For Diderot, a critic of the vitalist tradition and an advocate for technique, sensibility was ironically an inhibition to great acting; it led to moral and aesthetic mediocrity, incoherent outbursts of improvisation such as portrayed by Diderot's character of Rameau's nephew. The mid-eighteenth century's contradictory assumptions and competing paradigms about acting render *The Vicar*'s incessant depictions of theatricalized identities interpretable in terms of different theories of sensibility or, alternatively, as a satire against sensibility, in terms of practiced duplicity, automatic responses, and role-playing.

These competing theories of theatrical performance complicate the way that several characters are portrayed in *The Vicar*. The novel juxtaposes different psychological models, all of which could relate to changing ideas of performance and affect at the time. The two sisters, Sophia and Olivia, are initially depicted as a study in contrasts, for example. Olivia, heedlessly

romantic, is the more striking beauty who eventually runs away with the rakish Squire and risks becoming a fatally kept woman. Sophia, meanwhile, is the prudent and modest homebody whose common sense and philosophical acumen attracts the judicious eye of Sir William. However, even at the outset, the distinction between them hints at collapsing:

> Olivia, now about eighteen, had the luxuriance of beauty with which painters generally draw Hebe; open, sprightly, and commanding. Sophia's features were not so striking at first; but often did more certain execution; for they were soft, modest, and alluring. The one vanquished by a single blow, the other by efforts successfully repeated.
>
> The temper of a woman is generally formed from the turn of her features, at least it was so with my daughters. Olivia wished for many lovers. Sophia to secure one. Olivia was often affected from too great a desire to please. Sophia even represt excellence from her fears to offend. The one entertained me with her vivacity when I was gay, the other with her sense when I was serious. But these qualities were never carried to an excess in either, and I have often seen them exchange characters for a whole day together. A suit of mourning has transformed my coquet into a prude, and a new set of ribbands has given her younger sister more than natural vivacity. (11-12)

The vicar's description is ironic in so far as Olivia's beauty—described as luxuriant, thus connoting her desire for luxury; alluding to Hebe, the goddess of youth, despite being the older sister—almost causes *her* to be "vanquished" by her seduction. Similarly, the "execution" of Sophia's modest yet alluring features could describe their more finished painterly technique or their dead-on, mercenary ability to attract a wealthy husband. The beauty of her features depends

on their paradoxical quality to appear both shy and fetching. Sophia's wiles are quieter, yet work through repetition, foreshadowing her prolonged rendezvous with Sir William. Even the use of artful, painterly terms belies the innocence the vicar ascribes to them by suggesting that his daughters, too, are "painted ladies," not unlike the seemingly sophisticated whores they later seek to emulate. While the vicar is confident that the natural appearances of his daughters register their inner characters, he inadvertently takes back his claims when he mentions how their entire behavior can change with the slightest alteration of their dress. The novel continually reminds us to be wary of appearances; the reader should not be fooled by the sisters' looks since the vicar drops a hint that they are both actresses who perform according to the costumes they sport. The "turn" of their protean features gives away the fact that their guise can be turned to different uses, manipulated through conscious affectation or repression, thereby undermining the differences the vicar seeks to draw between them.

There are several metaphors throughout the novel that point toward the theatricalization of character, that is, character as a byproduct of dress and stage-acting rather than inner traits or emotions. The historical painting of the family, for example, which the vicar commissions to "shew the superiority of our taste" ends up demonstrating the very opposite (78-79). The painting is a hodgepodge of mythological details, with each family member aggrandized as the character in which they see themselves. The vicar encourages the artist to "not be too frugal of his diamonds in her [his wife's] stomacher and hair" (78) as well as to surround Sophia, in the guise of a shepherdess, "with as many sheep as the painter could put in for nothing" (79). In other words, the vicar is cheap. Yet, he seizes the opportunity to represent his family as both more wealthy and more virtuous than they really are. Squire Thornhill asks to be put into the picture, which the vicar thinks is an "indication of his desire to be introduced into the family,"

(79) but which turns out only to reflect his own vanity, again testifying to the Primroses' bad taste in allowing a well-known libertine to be depicted as part of their family. The final folly of the painting is that it is so large it cannot fit through the doors of the house, and so merely leans against the kitchen wall, "the jest of all our neighbors" (79). Barbara M. Benedict remarks that it "portrays a masquerade" (*Framing*, 54). Indeed, the scene depicts tableaux that reveal each character's self-idealization, the masks that inadvertently tell the truth about their individual aspirations. As such, it proves the family members' ideals at odds with each other and grossly out-of-proportion with the reality of the roles they inhabit. The painting depicts a gallimaufry in which each character performs in a different scene—Biblical tale or bawdy myth, pastoral or martial history—not unlike the mixture of modes in the novel itself. While the costumes represent a disparity between the character's inner and would-be outer natures, the costumes themselves reveal a disparity between what they pretend to represent and the actual shabby material they use to do so. Thus, the Primrose family may be accused of hubris for their self-aggrandizing vision or they may be accused of being bad actors unable to live up to the roles they would play.

The novel presents another theatrical metaphor when the vicar chastises his daughters and wife for putting on fine clothes and cosmetics: "These rufflings, and pinkings, and patchings will only make us hated by all the wives of all our neighbors," the vicar proclaims (25-26). The Primrose women reluctantly agree to change their dress. The vicar then proudly declares:

> the next day I had the satisfaction of finding my daughters, at their own request employed in cutting up their trains into Sunday waistcoats for Dick and Bill, the two little ones, and what was still more satisfactory, the gowns seemed improved by this curtailing. (26)

The reader might interpret this scene as the vicar does: the girls have learned modesty, and, moreover, charitably tailor the leftover fabric of their gowns to create suits for the little boys. Yet, another view might see the girls as disobediently "improving" their dresses—altering them into more fashionable or immodest cuts, and using their excess to further bedizen the coats of their brothers. Costumes are everywhere and inescapable: "mending" (a word the vicar frequently uses to connote moral improvement) only helps create another, perhaps more lavish suit. There is no natural, naked self in the social world—only a proliferation of different outfits and get-ups. This seems to be Jenkinson's point, too, when he tells Moses that it was not anything in his face that marked him out for a gull to his deception, but "your white stockings and the black ribband in your hair" (145). One's truest character is shown, ironically, by the clothes one wears.

That the vicar's girls have not, in fact, learned their lesson is confirmed when, soon after their cutting up their Sunday gowns, they are cooking a wash for their face, of which the vicar disapproves:

> for I knew that instead of mending the complexion they [washes] spoiled it. I therefore approached my chair by sly degrees to the fire, and grasping the poker, as if it wanted mending, seemingly by accident overturned the whole composition. (33)

The vicar inveighs against the cosmetic quality of a wash, even though a wash would restore one to a more "natural" complexion; thus, even the bare, unadorned face becomes figured as a kind of mask. The vicar, however, is the one who must masquerade his behavior in this scene since he

resorts to a ruse to get his daughters to heed his commands, more evidence that his daughters' earlier compliance to his commands had been their own sly form of rebellion. By a series of devious performances, the "composition" of the novel, too, is constantly overturned.

The "groce of green spectacles" (61) that Moses takes from Jenkinson in exchange for the colt is yet another telling theatrical prop. If the vicar had once benevolently lent a stranger a horse only to have it unreturned, here his son tries to sell a horse for profit and still gets nothing of value. What had been intended for a commercial transaction resembles inadvertent benevolence. The rims themselves, which Moses hoped to trade as broken silver, prove to be merely varnished copper (62). Though the vicar's disgusted wife wants to throw them into the fire, the vicar nonetheless plans to keep the spectacles. The glasses are a sign of the green, inexperienced perception of the Primrose family: like Olivia when she "acted the coquet to perfection, if that may be called acting which was her real character" (82), the glasses dress up the Primroses for what they are, as if their acting were their real character. But the colored glasses also represent the changing perspectives—and deceiving frames—that the novel continually uses. They play off the "spectacle" of the marketplace itself, and the fractured perceptions of value that are underwritten and traded there. The Primroses are themselves a group of inept spectacles, naïvely performing their various roles. The potential excess of a "groce" is turned into the paucity of almost nothing with the same quicksilver fungibility by which the novel's mawkish episodes can become mocking ones.

V. The Dramatic Viewpoint

The novel's emphasis on portraying theatricalized characters subverts both

sentimental and satiric interpretations. The vicar's joyful reunion with his prodigal son—a sentimental moment of pathos as the son recounts his many trials—nonetheless offers ample instances in the son's story of the beguiling facades of the busy world. In spite of this, these instances are not simply treated, as a satiric reader may think, as a path of snares and hoodwinks that the son narrowly avoids. Rather, the narrative subtly questions whether there is any genuine truth underlying these appearances: what identity can be exposed that is not just another example of acting? The difference may not be whether one shams or represents an authentic self, but whether one plays one's part well or poorly. That is to say, the narrative troubles the line upon which most satire depends, surface and reality, collapsing the distinction so that the vicar and his son are both positioned as types of actors in this scene. Viewed as actors among a social pageant, however, these characters also lose the sentimental reader's immediacy of identification—the emotional convergence of a heart-to-heart—since acting is a skill that mediates performed roles rather than necessarily an expression of inner truths. While the sentimental and satiric levels of discourse are simultaneously inculcated by the text, they are opposed not only by each other, but, in some cases, by another interpretation altogether: the dramatic viewpoint.

The often fluid line between enacting performed identities and engaging in social forgery comes up several times throughout the novel. The butler who pretends to be the master of the house, ironically to hear the vicar's lengthy political diatribe about respecting the sovereignty of the ruler, is countered when the mistress of the house arrives and "acted a studied part" (102). If the butler's pose is shown for false, though, the lady is also seen as playing make-believe: the very duplicity that has been exposed is thereby put into question. What more is there to being a prince or a pauper than playing dress-up? Likewise, the vicar himself follows a travelling actor despite "the impropriety of being in such company," even confessing that "I once had some

theatrical powers myself" (92). When they reach a town, the butler—known only at this point as "a well-drest gentleman"—asks the vicar "whether I was the real chaplain of the company, or whether it was only to be my masquerade character" (93). Perhaps, social identities can be said to be *forged* in both senses, as something made and as something passed off. A play-acting reverend delivering an exhortation is nearly indistinguishable from a so-called real preacher reading his sermon, as the role of a preacher itself is similar to that of an actor on stage.

Showing just how much one's identity depends on performance, the vicar's son, George, tells of his journeyman existence learning to impersonate a variety of trades. First, failing as an author, George meets a more successful writer who lives off patrons' subscriptions to his promised translations, which are never produced; this scamp asks the vicar's son if he can "borrow your face a bit" (105) since his usual clientele now recognize his trick. George himself, however, only hoped to have "drest up three paradoxes" that were "false, indeed, but… were new" (104), seeking to capitalize on passing off an outmoded sophistry as a fashionable metaphysic. Another job sees George acting, ironically, as a butler but actually procuring Thornhill women and wine, a task in which the chief business, George says, involved altering "my appearance by a very fine suit of clothes, and then I was admitted to his table upon the footing of half-friend, half-underling" (107). Again, George's status is ambiguous, half one thing and half another, the primary concern being his appearance. George even has to fight a duel as Thornhill's surrogate, but finds that the honorable lady and gentleman had only been "a woman of the town, and the fellow her bully and a sharper" (108). While George is swindled into acting as a friend, the other parties pretend their noble roles. While these incidents can be read as satirical, deceptive shams, they may also lead to George's realization that there is not any deeper truth below the superficial appearances of social performance.

George even considers selling himself as an indentured servant, saying of the rogue who offered him a contract that, "I knew in my heart that the fellow lied, and yet his promise gave me pleasure, there was something so magnificent in the sound" (110). Despite acknowledging that the hawker would betray him into slavery, George still finds pleasure in the spin—the mere meaningless sound—of the sales pitch. This two-fold illusion is like the impression made by an actor, whom, although a spectator knows the actor presents a fiction, nonetheless may be profoundly affected (even more affected by a performance than by reality). The satiric reader may laugh at mere sound triumphing over sense and the temptations offered by delusory hopes. Yet, if George avoids striking this almost Faustian bargain into servitude, he later goes on to become a spin-doctor himself, winning prizes in rhetoric and disputations. Finally, after being employed in a few more tasks such as a "phony" art connoisseur, George at last turns his skills to acting itself—a trade he has long been practicing covertly—at which point the vicar discovers him for his son, recognizing him in his relation of son only when his son is playing a part. The distinction between pretending and authentic being is broken down.

Near the end, George comes full circle by fighting a duel *against* Squire Thornhill's surrogate domestics—who act in the very role he himself had once performed—in attempting to "save" Olivia's honor. Yet, if the earlier case had him fighting for a woman of questionable reputation, the novel insinuates that Olivia, too, may be less than honorable. George acts as both stand-in defender for a rouge and (perhaps misguided) champion of innocence. For the former service, he receives no recompense but a suspect recommendation of character that comes to nothing, again hinting that inner character depends on entirely on outer artifacts. For the latter, he receives injury and the insult of a legal sentence of death (160). This "new" law against duels, which the novel invents for its purposes, is a reform against the archaic system of justice that

relies on notions of chivalry. The new law backfires since it punishes not the libertine aristocrat but his middle-class antagonist, who earnestly accepts the feudal ideology to which the upper-class merely pays lip-service. George acts as both executioner and whipping boy while the Squire remains unfazed. In one sense, George's oppression by the squirearchy is almost total since he is rendered abject from all sides; in another sense, he is a toady who practically does himself in by playing all the parts in his own tragedy.

Even when employed as a thespian, his final trade, George has trouble finding a suitable part to play: just as he cannot settle on a job in life, in the theater he is "driven for some time from one character to another, till at last Horatio was fixed upon" (116). His part as Horatio highlights his role as a poor bystander and spectator—but Horatio, as his name implies, is also an orator, the one left standing who communicates the story, thereby potentially altering its import despite his limited role in the action. Thus, George, like the vicar, is a vicarious character, a stand-in or a figure of mediation, a surrogate narrator. Mr. Arnold tells Dr. Primrose that, "Acting… was not learnt in a day… But he [George] seems born to tread the stage" (101). George's vagabond lifestyle of performing various occupations—much like Sir William's early years—has prepared him well for the occupation of acting. Mr. Arnold's comment marks out the paradox that acting is a practiced skill yet a skill that effaces the signs of its own artifice, making the best actors those who "seem born" to the stage: the process of naturalizing the performance of the "natural" emotions one performs everyday nevertheless requires a great deal of rehearsal. Actors channel the sympathy of the spectators without necessarily feeling any emotion themselves. George emphasizes the artifice of the stage when he "bursts into a flood of tears" provoked by seeing Miss Wilmot in the audience, as the real tears he sheds are looked upon as inappropriate to the simulation of the stage, and he is soon replaced by an understudy (101-102).

As a stand-in, he becomes replaced by another stand-in: the role itself is demarcated as important, not the person who occupies it. When George encounters his father and Miss Wilmot, the vicar claims George "never could counterfeit a false resentment," but Miss Wilmot's "reception was mixed with seeming neglect, yet I could perceive she acted a studied part" (102). Here, however, the tables are turned, and the reality of emotions in everyday life appears modeled on theatrical simulation; the odd syntax might, in fact, indicate that George may be paradoxically counterfeiting a *true* resentment.

A satiric viewpoint might regard George's vagabondage as a series of mock trades without real merit; however, by ending his picaresque travail as an actor—where, ironically, he is seen, at last, as his "true" self, the vicar's son—the tale also subverts this view. Like fiction-writing, the profession of acting is not a sham since, although one pretends, one admits of pretending. Yet, many of the skills that George acquired and cast off can likewise blur the distinction between those who display their expertise and those who are faking it. For example, the art connoisseur who mimics other art connoisseurs ultimately adheres to the only objective standard of judgment available, the taste of the town: *de gustibus non est disputandum*. Similarly, the person who is judged to win a disputation exhibits his or her talent at rhetoric in a field where the notion of objective truth may be irrelevant. When George sets out to teach Greek, considering this to be an authentic piece of learning, he finds that the master of the academy to which he applies knows no Greek, and so dismisses him since he deems such learning worthless (112). On one hand, this could be taken as a satire of the false scholar, lampooning the elite running a university yet ignorant of the classics; on the other hand, though, if a whole society moves away from classical education, such knowledge may become dead and antiquated. What use are the minutiae of Greek declensions in a culture increasingly devoted to commerce?

Jenkinson, we recall, mocks the little Greek he knows by appropriating it to scam others. Thus, the novel offers fodder for the satirist, pointing out how the world operates by mere show, at the same time that it validates the idea that the whole world *is* a stage and the show's the thing. Where social constructs are concerned, one cannot appeal beyond the professed judgment of social actors because the construction of any such reality depends on an iterative performance of mutually constitutive roles. In these cases, simulation *is* reality.

VI. Constant Reversals and the Farcical Ending

The novel's ability to turn tropes on their heads is prominently foregrounded in the flames that devour the vicar's house. Peter Dixon remarks, "that the Primrose home should be destroyed by fire is particularly horrifying," (93) given the emphasis that the vicar places on the domestic comforts of the fire-side hearth. Yet, even the scenes of supposed domestic bliss are actually filled with squabbles; as Barbara M. Benedict writes, "domestic fidelity appears as constant, if amicable, wrangling between the weak husband and the crude wife" (*Framing*, 50). To symbolize the family breaking apart, the emblem of the secure, middle-class home changes into the hellish conflagration that injures the vicar and threatens to destroy his family. At issue in the incident is the materialistic valuation of the home. While the home can be the repository of furnishings that symbolically insulate one from financial downfall and the competition of the public sphere, the very urge to accumulate such trappings (keeping up with the proverbial Joneses) can, in turn, lead to dissatisfaction and ruin.

The situation presented by the Primroses has the affective structure defined by Lauren Berlant as "cruel optimism": "A relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing" (1); or, alternatively, "cruel optimism is the condition of

maintaining an attachment to a significantly problematic object" (24). The vicar's very desire for security, manifested in this case by his attachment to his hearth and home, creates a destructive tendency to expose himself in the predatory marketplace in order to try to acquire more wealth and security, thus undermining his initial goal; likewise, his benighted yearning for a cozy, familial warmth causes him to be unprepared for the flames of passion that erupt within his family and their unforeseen, destabilizing influences. The vicar's desires for warmth and comfort also, more literally, result in the home itself erupting in a scene of spontaneous combustion.

The vicar embodies an agent implicated in a capitalist regime during a transformation in which it has progressively less use for him: he struggles both to adapt to the emerging marketplace and to retain the residual values of an older, feudal, and Christian, way of life, bearing with—and laying bare—the copious ironies and contradictions the new economic structures produce. Liz Bellamy notes that "the choice is between the outmoded and irrelevant social vision of Dr. Primrose, and a ruthlessly aggressive and acquisitive commercial ethos" (140). Perhaps part of the farcical delight of the novel (since farce tends to exaggerate and accelerate tragic situations to comic effect) is how it pulls off a resolution that satisfies the vicar's scruples while at the same time seeming to alleviate the aggressive impulses of the market into forms of cooperation and benevolence. The resolution is pure fantasy, and, through it, the novel highlights the incongruity of the vicar's desires and his reality, juxtaposing the farce-like comedy of the preposterous fairy-tale conclusion with the bleaker choices the novel in fact offers: either succumbing to the depredations of the market or to increasing poverty, incarceration, and obsolescence.

At several points the narrative of *The Vicar* ostentatiously strains the credulity of the reader, but at none more so than the climactic resolution. The unmasking of several characters at

the conclusion lends it an air of the "Scooby-Doo" ending, as it might be term today, in which all hidden identities are revealed and rectified in a ridiculously brief and tidy denouement. W. O. S. Sutherland remarks that "The ending of *The Vicar of Wakefield* has been called both a sentimental novel and a parody on sentimental novels" (89). That is, it takes the structure of the conventional sentimental novels' impulse toward tying up the plot in tidy marriage knots and exacerbates it to a farcical degree. Not only do all the characters happen to meet in the prison, which would be an improbable circumstance and one potentially indicating their shared guilt, but the vicar and his family, Jenkinson, and the rest of the inmates are all released on little more than the authority of Sir William's word, although at the beginning of the scene he poses as Mr. Burchell. These moments of sheer coincidence or absurd reversal are often regarded as among the novel's weaknesses, and they seem to accelerate toward the climax. Rather, given how frequently these moments occur to structure the narrative, they can be understood as part of the novel's design to enact a dialectic between the paranoid, satiric reader and the more sentimental and sympathetic one, relaying a narrative which is *about* the vacillations of suspicion and trust onto the hermeneutic process by which that narrative is interpreted.

In this way, both sentimental identification and satiric exposure remain valid alternatives, though either one seems undercut by the evidence for the other. A vivid emblem of this situation is given when the prisoners switch the vicar's sermon for an "obscene jest-book" (148), a prank that gives "more universal pleasure than all the rest" (147). The serious moral tale is suddenly confused with the bawdy anecdote—just as the novel's edifying apologue about kindness can be taken for a caustic spoof about con men. The absurd reversals put the reader, as well as the characters, on unstable footing. By orchestrating a steady occurrence of coincidences, sudden calamities, *deus ex machina*, disguises, and changes of heart, the reader may be forced to

confront his or her own judgments against that of the vicar's. While some may trust the vicar as a generally honest and genial narrator, others may view him as almost wholly unreliable, his naiveté producing disjunctions and ironies throughout the narrative. For example, the vicar, though he makes repeated professions of believing in the high-minded doctrine of a strict monogamist, is quick to sign Thornhill's petition, which gives his blessing for Thornhill to marry another wife, as soon as the vicar mistakenly thinks that his daughter, Olivia, has died (154). The additional irony is that the vicar submits to Thornhill only when Thornhill supposedly brings about the death of Olivia, almost as if it were a reward for not just ruining her, but ruining her so thoroughly that she dies of her infamy. The vicar insists on seeing his daughter's marriage as real and not a sham, despite Olivia's (erroneous) knowledge otherwise, because of his quixotic faith in his daughter's innocence.

Though prima facie, the climactic revelations in the final prison scenes appear the most sentimental moments in the novel, the reversals of the ending do not always validate conventionally pious or upstanding interpretations of the characters. Although their marriage accidentally proves to be legitimate—due to Jenkinson's malicious switch of a fake for a real marriage license—Thornhill and Olivia do not live together as man and wife at the novel's end. Instead, Thornhill:

> resides in quality of companion at a relation's house, being very well liked and seldom sitting at the side-table, except when there is no room at the other; for they make no stranger of him. His time is pretty much taken up in keeping his relation, who is a little melancholy, in spirits, and in learning to blow the French horn. My eldest daughter

> [Olivia], however, still remembers him with regret; and she has even told me, though I make a secret of it, that when he reforms she may be brought to relent. (188-189)

Oddly, Olivia and Thornhill lived together under the pretense of illegitimacy, but are separated when they find they had been legally wed. Thornhill is exiled to sitting at the side-table, as if he were a child, "learning to blow"—rather than actually playing—the French horn, an instrument that hints of his previous life of "French" decadence and (sexual and aristocratic) hunting, now made to seem ridiculous. He is reduced almost to the status of a court jester for his relation, who we may guess is Sir William since he is the only relation of Thornhill's depicted in the novel. The vicar himself acts as an untrustworthy gossip, too open in his honesty this time, for he gives away the secret that his daughter confided in him. In a final role reversal, Olivia is given the reigns as to whether to consent to their marriage, the once haughty male rake seeming to have no power in the relationship any longer.

The convolutions involving the status of legitimate wedlock in *The Vicar* may likely allude to the eighteenth century's most popular sentimental novel, *Pamela*: specifically, the gypsy's prophetic letter revealing that Mr. B. planned a sham marriage. Despite this warning, Pamela consents to a private marriage to Mr. B. without any legal assurances that the marriage is publically legitimate. Lady Davers assures Pamela that she "was not married" (431) and then forces Mr. B. to swear an oath that "Pamela Andrews is really and truly thy lawful wife, without sham, without deceit, without double-meaning" (446). However, once the specter of so much doubt and double-meaning has been raised, it is not easily suppressed. If one oath can be feigned, then so can another. Moreover, there are not only plentiful double-meanings, but double standards, as well. Indeed, later, after Pamela is reconciled with Lady Davers, Lady Davers

confides to Pamela that "you must not expect to have him all to yourself, I doubt" (481), which Mr. B.'s reference to "we rakes" (473) does nothing to quell. Even if they were legitimately married, Mr. B. seems likely to continue taking mistresses. The novel ends with Pamela practically adopting Mr. B.'s illegitimate child while his so-called first wife, Sally Godfrey, was "happily married, passing to her husband for a young widow" in the West Indies (513). Thus, the whole matter of a woman's virtue or ruin, while simultaneously being enshrined as an all-important truth, is nonetheless repeatedly turned into a legal quibble subject to retroactive finagling and feigning.

Olivia's circumstances are similar to Pamela's. Olivia runs away with a rake (whereas Pamela was kidnapped, though willingly returns) and knowingly consents to a sham-marriage (whereas Pamela pretends, at least, to think her private marriage is legitimate). Pamela and Olivia alike find that their marriage is indeed legitimate in the end. Throughout the narrative, Pamela ostensibly repudiates the advances that she covertly seems to invite. Olivia and Pamela, though, have inverse fates: Olivia, rather than live as man and wife as Pamela does with Mr. B. in the face of his likely continuation of infidelity, is separated from Thornhill despite what appears his thorough—and comically infantilized—reformation. When she is said to be waiting for Squire Thornhill "to reform," what evidence is she now seeking? To make the comparison even more explicit, both women reject an entirely sincere yet uncommanding suitor, both of whom are a pastoral bumpkin named Williams. The redaction of *Pamela* in *The Vicar*, then, plays up some of the latent suspicions that surround Pamela, and which can make her appear a fraud—or, at least, an unconscious coquette—to some readers. *The Vicar*'s eleventh-hour circumvention of ruin in its masque-like happy ending allows sentimental readers to enjoy the pathos of their identification with the characters more fully than the quibbles of doubt that persist

in *Pamela*. Yet, *The Vicar*'s plot possesses a contrived absurdity, and the double nature of nearly every character in it provides satiric readers with ample ammunition to question any pretense of its characters' moral integrity. The plot's constant reversals—accelerated at the climax—can lend support for an ultimately sentimental turn or they could be taken as evidence of a satire on the falseness of forced sentimental conclusions. Alternatively, the reversals may indicate the provisional and performed nature of the construction of narrative along with the unknowability of characters and their fates, pointing toward the possibilities of still further changes off-stage or outside the frame of the story we are told.

VII. **The Prison House of Performance**

Despite the vicar's moral failings and hang-ups about trifling, antiquated dogma, near the end of the novel the vicar is apparently able to reform the prisoners through his sermonizing. How is the reader to take this, considering the vicar seems inept at legislating commands in his own family? Could the vicar have exaggerated—perhaps even fabricated—this part of the tale? A sentimental reader might believe that the vicar's adversity has cured him of his initial pride, and that his earnest perseverance allows him to hold the prisoner's attention. But there is a hint that the vicar has learned a more theatrical lesson, as well; "we should find that wretches, whose souls are held as dross, only wanted the hand of a refiner… as their faces are like ours, their hearts are so too," the vicar says (150). The vicar reforms the prisoners by refusing to respond to them in their role as criminals, treating them as if their mask of criminality had been wiped away already. Subsequently, given new faces, they enact more respectable roles. This effectively aligns with Jenkinson's tale of how he became a confidence man—everyone treated him as cunning despite his honesty, because of his sly looks until he eventually "turned sharper" (146).

In this view, there is neither a sentimental core of goodness in human nature nor a satiric heart of rot cloaked in hypocrisy; rather, we simply fall into the dramatic role that society insists we take, whether good or ill.

The satirical view, though pushed to the periphery in this section, still exercises its penumbral influence. Just before the vicar is about to deliver a triumphant final sermon on his deathbed—included in its entirety as Chapter XXIX so that the reader likewise becomes its addressee—he tells his son, "I will point out the way, and my soul shall guide yours in the ascent, for we will take our flight together" (160). Far from being able to transcend in a flight of apotheosis, the vicar "made an effort to rise from [his] straw, but wanted strength, and was only able to recline against the wall" (160). The earthbound nature of the vicar is further reinforced when, instead of dying, by which we might imagine he is released to the glory of heaven, he remains instead anchored to his social circle where his martyr-like ruin quickly turns to material riches.

Though the sermon seems sentimental when read "straight" in isolation as its own chapter, we can recognize its satiric import in context. Most obviously, after the chapter that contains the sermon, the plot moves on to its finale that has noticeable strains of farce and parody: such a jarring turn can motivate readers to re-evaluate their own response and reinterpret the significance of previous scenes, even ones where they felt most confident of the tone and intent. Throughout the sermon, the vicar repeatedly insists on the wretched condition of the prisoners, whom he claims are "indeed of all men the most miserable" (164). However, the "gloomy walls," "emaciated looks," and "groans," (164) that the vicar thinks he observes, whether correctly or not we have no way of knowing, have most likely been imposed on the

prisoners not by the jail but by the vicar himself. After all, when the vicar entered the prison he encountered a scene quite different:

> I expected upon my entrance to find nothing but lamentations, and various sounds of misery; but it was very different. The prisoners seemed all employed in one common design, that of forgetting through merriment or clamour. I was apprized of the usual perquisite… This was immediately sent away for liquor, and the whole prison soon was filled with riot, laughter, and prophaneness.
>
> 'How,' cried I to myself, 'shall men so very wicked be cheerful, and shall I be melancholy! I feel only the same confinement as them, and I think I have more reason to be happy.' (139)

The prison is a scene of carnival where drinking and merriment, rather than misery and darkness, abound, as the prisoners themselves are lords of misrule. It is likely, therefore, that the sanctimonious vicar projects his own sense of wretchedness onto the prisoners during the sermon, even admitting that, "though the instruction I communicate may not mend them, yet it will assuredly mend myself" (147). Selfishly, his so-called "instruction" can help mend the vicar's own sense of injustice at seeing the criminals sportive and happy while he feels abject, though his exhortations may have no real effect on their behavior or condition, or even his.

The vicar also imposes on the prisoners in another way, by instituting a system of labor and discipline: setting the men to cut tobacco stoppers and pegs for shoemakers, issuing fines, and promulgating rewards for "peculiar industry" (148). While no doubt this may reflect genuine calls for penal reform based on ideas of penitence and productivity, along the lines of Jeremy

Bentham, just as the vicar's sermon reflects an earnest mode of Anglican preaching in the vein of Jeremy Taylor, when set against the larger narrative, the vicar's "reform" can take on ironic import. In the sermon, after all, the vicar is perplexed why the subordinate parts of a system of universal felicity must be imperfect in themselves and wretched (161): although he is referring to the theological question of why pain and sin are necessary in a perfect world, his lament can recoil to refer to the system of subordination that he himself has established in the prison. As a deific legislator, the vicar is responsible for the affliction that results under his administration, perhaps indicating that his scheme for reformation is not as perfect as he presumes. Furthermore, there is considerable dissimulation involved in his call for the prisoners to renounce their worldly possessions as vain temptations in his sermon while simultaneously instituting a proto-capitalist economy wherein the prisoners may emulate middle-class workers who manufacture and sell things so as to "earn something every day" (148). The prisoners had previously taxed newcomers a "perquisite" and shared communal wealth in a more egalitarian government. If the vicar turns the prisoners into model (albeit wretched) laborers, he himself then takes on the more ambivalent status of a privileged overseer. While critics who read the novel through a sentimental lens may view such contradictions as prevalent ideological incongruities during Goldsmith's epoch, others may read them as revealing the vicar's blindness attributable to his satiric representation.

John Bender, for one, is confidently on the side of exposing Goldsmith's ideological shortcomings. He writes:

> The ironies that mid-twentieth-century critics have found in *The Vicar of Wakefield* are generated not by flaws in the character of Dr. Primrose but by contradictions that mark

> reformist thought during the 1760s and that more generally characterize the transition to modern impersonal governance. (143)

In order to characterize Goldsmith's—rather than the Vicar's—failings, however, he admits to rehabilitating a very earnest, moralistic interpretation of the text, claiming that the novel espouses the "illusionistic aesthetic of transparent discourse in the realist novel" (134) and that for "nearly two hundred years… the novel had been prized for its simple clarity of representation" (151). Bender's strategy seems disingenuous on many fronts. First, he willfully reduces the text to a simplistic transparency so that he can then display his own superior sophistication. Second, he is historically inaccurate about the reception of *The Vicar*, which elicited puzzlement and a variety of responses from the beginning, as even its advertisement predicts, declaring "There are a hundred faults in this Thing, and a hundred things might be said to prove them beauties" (3). Ricardo Quintana remarks that "from the very first [critics]… reflecte[d] a certain bewilderment" with the novel (99-100). Third, Bender isolates episodes in the text—chopping it up only to grind his ax—instead of seeing how different episodes artfully play off each other to produce more nuanced perspectives and paradox, resulting in a novel that is anything but realist and transparent. Lastly, Bender is ultimately motivated to deliver his own sincerely moralistic sermon about the need for contemporary prison reform, as his conclusion reveals, proclaiming (ironically!) to be "restaging… multiple perspectives" (153) found in ideological fissures rather than engaging with the multiple perspectives already staged within the text itself. Bender thus uses *The Vicar* as a springboard for his own polemic, enlisting Goldsmith as his adversary by ignoring ambiguities in the novel that could potentially complicate his own reformist position.

The version of New Historicism that Bender practices too eagerly appropriates the text as a mere artifact with a fixed and straightforward meaning in order to advocate for the critic's own pre-established agenda; morally worthy as that agenda is, in doing so, the critic is not susceptible to being changed by the text that he or she confronts. Such methods efface the ambiguities of the text to solidify the critic's pre-determined outcome. Richard Rorty writes that the difference between such a method and more inspired versions of reading is:

> between knowing what you want to get out of a person or thing or text in advance and hoping that the person or thing or text will help you want something different—that he or she or it will help you change your purposes, and thus to change your life. This distinction, I think, helps us to highlight the difference between methodical and inspired readings of texts. (106)

A more methodical reading—whether Bender's or Hopkins's—might have the virtue of smoothing out inconsistencies within *The Vicar* to arrive at clearer conclusions. However, such methodological critics usually rely on the same surface/depth distinction that animates both sentiment and satire. To arrive at a sentimental or a satiric interpretation, they privilege one aspects of the text over the other as the more profound and revealing layer. The danger those methodologies run is discounting or ignoring not only the ambiguities in the text, but the ambivalence within the critic's own position. The power of a text such as *The Vicar* is that it may help readers recognize their own fraught and multiple perspectives, potentially transforming them because—or even in spite of—their attempts to render the text coherent.

Among the early readers of *The Vicar*, Thomas de Quincey relates how he purportedly gave the novel to a country girl of seventeen. She mistook the text for a true account, claims de Quincey: "this artless young rustic… had never heard of novels and romances as a bare possibility amongst all the shameless devices of London swindlers" (343). De Quincey mocks the girl's naiveté for taking the fanciful tale of Dr. Primrose for "pure gospel truth" (343) even as he pretends to argue for the fiction's verisimilitude. Yet his mention of "London swindlers," apparently referencing the Jenkinson episode of the green spectacles within the novel, gives away a more complex view of the text as capable of hoodwinking potentially credulous readers, if not being an outright satire upon them. In his allusion, then, novels themselves are likened to colored glasses, devices to display different perspectives. De Quincey stages himself as the more knowing reader who ridicules the naïf "surrendering her prefect faith and loving sympathy" (343) to the characters; yet, his ridicule can be turned back against himself since his language reveals—despite his flimsy protestations to the contrary—that he is seducing the girl, "shamelessly" gaining *her* sympathy only to betray her later. Then again, perhaps he covertly lampoons *his* more gullible readers who would believe that a literate person (even one so strongly marked out as innocent by gender, class, age, and space) could be blissfully unaware of the existence of fiction. De Quincey underscores the epistemological uncertainty of the text by contrasting it to the history of the Spanish Nun, which has "been authenticated" yet was habitually "classed as the most lawless romance" (343). There is no authoritative position available within either text, he implies, by which the reader can discern fact from fiction, or, for that matter, irony from literal statement. De Quincey's anecdote, in other words, allegorizes while duplicating various reader positions available within the novel, not the least of these being the way in which his critical anecdote dramatizes the roles of the reader positions of the young

girl and de Quincey himself. De Quincey thus recognizes the mercurial nature of the text as a potential touchstone for enacting transformations, capable of ultimately reversing the roles its readers play, as well.

Many critics have complained about the lack of unity in the text or have tried to foist their own interpretive unity on the text. Peter Dixon states that "In its lack of integration, the Burchell/Thornhill character is representative of the book as a whole. It is less a question of the diversity of materials the novel contains… than that there is no single, or even dominant, manner of discourse…. *The Vicar of Wakefield* is too protean to be fully satisfying" (96). Yet, few literary critics would venture a similar complaint about the protean and diffuse quality of, say, *Ulysses* or *Moby Dick*. Dixon, like many literary critics of *The Vicar*, has sought a dominant and controlling point of view against which its ironies can be read as such, a hegemonic master discourse to which the other discourses can be subordinated, or a stable framework by which one could unambiguously read its ideology. Such critics' failure to locate such a platform, a determinate position on whether the novel is satiric or sentimental—or even dramatic as I argue here in part—seems less a fault of the novel than the assumptions that proliferate in literary criticism itself. *The Vicar of Wakefield*'s disjunctive discourses, radically unreliable narrator, and competing paradigms of genre, performance, and character expose the folly of decisive, methodical accounts of the novel: these overly decisive, largely predetermined claims can be seen as byproducts of interpreters' critical lenses—a gross of green spectacles, indeed.

Working One's Assets: Narrative Circulation and the Control of Affect in Frances Brooke's *The Excursion*

Frances Brooke's *The Excursion* (1777) has been accused of capitulating to the capitalist worldview that it critiques by reverting to a sentimental fairy-tale ending in which the heroine gains title and fortune. This ending, however, is consonant with the novel as a whole, given that the heroine's education she gains in her journey to the city is a lesson in how to feign the very innocence she is in the process of losing so as to become as sophisticated as the urbane narrator. The novel's structural chiasmus represents her would-be suitor, Lord Melvile, gaining the ability to genuinely feel while Maria, the heroine, learns to artfully dissimulate her affections. At several points, contrived authorial interventions prevent the heroine from having a fall from social grace by suppressing the circulation of gossip. Ultimately, the heroine's triumph is her assumption of the role of author in which she may act as an agent to control the production of her own representations. The novel co-opts the form of the sentimental novel only to deconstruct the values of sentimental discourse, staging a heroine whose development underscores the importance of rhetorical control and the performing affects in order to navigate the treacherous world of fashionable society as well as to gain financial and class standing.

I. Of Fairy-Tale Endings and Capitalist Capitulation

The Excursion, though relatively neglected by scholarship, has recently received increasing recognition as a pivotal sentimental novel that shapes the genre's later turn into bildungsroman in such lauded texts as *Evelina* and *Sense and Sensibility*. *The Excursion* juxtaposes a high-spirited yet sentimental ingénue, Maria Villiers, with a worldly-wise, satirical narrator. Maria journeys to London to try her luck in the literary and marriage markets among licentious widows and worldly libertines. Similar to *The Vicar of Wakefield*, the novel's quicksilver tone is by turns sentimental, satiric, and what might be called dramatic. The story

itself appears to conflate "The Jilted Lover" and Wilson's long inset narrative in *Joseph Andrews*, with the narrator's voice often as bumptious and bristling as Fielding's own. Just as The Licensing Act caused Fielding to move from drama to novel, Brooke, in *The Excursion*, shows that social pressures and unwritten laws may have prompted eighteenth-century women to turn to novelistic rather than dramatic forms. Nonetheless, the short chapters self-consciously depict theatrical tableaux, in which the characters strike vivid poses, rather than proceeding in a continuous narrative. The motif of gardening and landscape repeatedly demonstrate how the natural and the artificial are mutually compromised in their representations, much like novelistic and dramatic forms themselves.

Maria is the sympathetic, country-bred innocent amidst a social scene of self-serving fops and female gamesters; she is also, however, a fortune-hunting social climber with designs to ensnare the *précieux* Lord Melvile. Her other scheme of advancing her fame and fortune involves her epic poem, her novel, and her tragedy, especially in getting her drama produced by one of the playhouses. Over the course of the novel, Maria gambles her heart on a rich lover in the marriage-market, her reputation in the literary market of playhouse managers, and her wealth in the social market of card games and fetes. Maria manages to find neither literary fame nor titled fortune, barely escaping both the infamy of being published in the pages of a gossip column and the various debts she accumulates to keep up appearances in town. As her funds dwindle, though, she apparently enlarges her store of wisdom, learning to appreciate the security of her modest station in her more intimate society back home in the country. Despite her financial loses, she ostensibly gains self-knowledge: at the novel's turning point, Maria falls in love with a decidedly more middle-class suitor. Yet, at the eleventh hour, she inherits an

unexpected windfall, which allows her to enact her original fantasies by constructing a private playhouse in the country and returning to London in a coach-and-six.

Critics such as Jodi Wyett and Jessica Richard view the ending as unfortunately capitulating to a capitalist ideology, which the majority of the novel does much to critique. The ending, these critics claims, is predicated on economic transactions wherein individuals must believe in a mystifying romance of beating the odds. This interpretation of the ending, however, neglects that the transformation Maria undergoes is increasingly to perform the innocence that she is in the process of losing. Instead of returning to her country estate as a naïf who has been humbled by the duplicity in the big city, retreating to her safe abode of sure friends, she brings back with her the knowledge of the town. No longer in a state of starry-eyed innocence, Maria has picked up a knack for interpreting subtexts and negotiating others' motives; she has developed a mastery of masquerade; and, though her tragedy is never read by the literary manager of the theater, she has turned into an actress playing in the romantic comedy of her life, becoming an apt manager of her own affairs.

How much Maria is to be derided for being an "adventurer" and how much the reader is supposed to sympathize with her adventures is a tricky question, as the novel strikes an ironic and ambivalent attitude through the narrator's voice. At one point in the plot, Maria receives an anonymous hundred pounds to help cover her debts, later discovered to be from her benevolent, if patriarchal, friend Mr. Hammond. The narrator remarks:

> As we are not writing a fairy-tale, but the true history of a young lady in Old England; a country where these little benevolent beings have long left off their delightful midnight

> gambols, and do not even condescend to drop a sixpence in the shoe of Marian; it may be necessary to account for this very well-timed, though anonymous, act of friendship. (121)

This sentence, in fact, forms the whole of Chapter XII in Book VII. The narrator denies the novel to be a fairy-tale, claiming that the story's account must square with the accounting of such fortuitous sums: the narrator is writing for a reader who expects the story to abide by modern and realistic conventions. And yet, by saying "Old England" and speaking of fairies dropping gifts as if it were only a tradition that had been left off rather than wholly unreal, the narrator also affirms and foreshadows the novel's fairy-tale ending, which perhaps the more sentimentally-inclined reader secretly desires. The Arthurian legend of Maid Marian recalls Maria herself, even as the fairy's midnight gambols may allude to Maria's indiscrete midnight tête-a-tête with Lord Melvile, where she gambled for his heart and wealth. Thus, the novel at once repudiates the fantastic nature of benevolent creatures fixing errors so that everything ends happily and assures the reader that everything will nonetheless end happily through outside benevolent influences.

Jessica Richard, reflecting on such fairy-tale endings, writes that "the novel… critiques Maria's romantic economics as naïve and even potentially destructive, though endors[es] her sentimental sweetness of temper" (194). For Richard, the novel reveals Maria's husband-hunting and literary expectations as misplaced bets, no different than gambling or other transactions in the emerging capitalist market economy itself, which is based on a romance of the individual beating long odds in the face of rational calculation that would predict otherwise. Richard points out how the then-innovative British national lottery, financial systems of debt and credit, and modern capital stock trading all have similar foundations. Richard views the ending of *The Excursion* as succumbing to the very system it exposes since it rescues Maria from her missteps

by “romance mechanisms… mysterious benefactors, chance meetings, and unexpected legacies from distant relatives” (194). Richard states that “though she does not gamble in the last extremity, Maria’s romantic belief in lucky, unlikely chance events, represented by her decision to gamble, and her belief in a sentimental economy of friendship are reaffirmed by Mr. Hammond’s unexpected monetary gift” (194-195), and so the novel ultimately “endorses a phantasmatic English country economy without questioning its foundation in urban mercantilism and imperialism” (195). Richard, however, is impervious to the satiric edge that the ending gives Maria’s sudden reversal of fortune; surely, the last minute windfall inheritance of title and money is meant to be a preposterous intervention. It is a further economic critique that points out that the older feudal-aristocratic inheritance structures, to which emerging capitalist markets seem to offer an alternative, are equally dangerous gambles, as well.

The ending is patently farce rather than putative realism—as evidenced by the fact that the benefactor is a character entirely unknown to the novel, a cipher inserted to move the plot towards its inevitable conclusion. The novel has already recognized that such unjustified fairy-tale endings sit uneasily with modern (capitalist) realism in which each party acts from motivations of self-interest. Jodi Wyett perceives how “the satirical stance of the narrator tempers the conventional ending of *The Excursion*” (138) and recognizes that “Brooke’s ending is pure, self-conscious fantasy” (148). Yet, Wyett, too, regards the ending as advocating for the “establishment of a utopian, agrarian space, removed from the economic exchanges necessary to the social structures valued in the city” (147). There is little sense, though, that the cosmopolitan narrator and the sophisticated readers would countenance an agrarian space as a utopian model. Rather, what the farce and fantasy of the ending reveals is a play-acting of the scene of pastoral, which is only available to the privileged townsperson. Indeed, the construction of a theatre on the

estate reinforces this idea. Maria can practice her sweet temper, rehearsing her self-styled role as an ingénue, while ritually expunging the naiveté that would likely have led to her becoming a tragic fallen woman. In the crassest economic terms, she must learn to sell herself—not through outright prostitution, but through the performance of innocence that allows a Pamela to rise in the world, for Maria never genuinely renounces her pecuniary goals. Thus, Maria ultimately comes to share in the social milieu inhabited by the narrator and the readers, and her upward mobility depends on her ability to use her sizzle to obtain higher stakes in the game. Since there is no escape from gambling in a capitalist system, Maria's best hope is to learn how to play the odds, and perhaps tilt them in her favor.

II. Becoming the Narrator

The sustained sense of irony in the novel largely derives from the worldly-wise narrator's portrayal of the social blunders of the naïve Maria. Maria's series of faux pas entangle her in deepening misunderstandings among the backbiting demimonde; however, the sophisticated, all-seeing narrator is able to judge Maria more sympathetically while revealing the hypocrisy of those around her in London. As Jodi Wyett notes, the "omniscient narrator… watches the inept heroine with some measure of sympathy but also a healthy dose of censure" (138). Such a position, Wyett argues, allows readers to:

> look in sympathetically… but remain decidedly above her [Maria's] mistakes, aligned with the knowing narrator…. [which] serves not to invite identification between readers and the guileless heroine, but rather to distance an unexpectedly informed, urban readership from Maria's mistakes. (139-140)

The narrator reinforces a conventional hierarchy and decorum, which the well-read, polished, sophisticated, and feminized reader presumably shares. The reader does not identify with Maria, but rather takes a stance akin to pity toward her; the reader invests in Maria's circumstances only in so far as she can recognize the pitfalls Maria fails to.

Yet Wyett, by aligning the fashionably cosmopolitan reader and the author herself with the narrator, overlooks the way in which Maria represents a thinly veiled autobiographical portrait of Frances Brooke, especially in her struggles for theatrical success. K. J. H. Berland relates how the young Brooke was in Maria's position since "none of the playhouses had accepted her plays, and she had not yet managed to break into the charmed circle that could provide friendly recommendations" (219). However, after her rejection by Garrick, Brooke later became co-manager, along with Mary Ann (Fanny) Yates, of the Haymarket Opera. Similarly in the novel, Berland notes, the "unexpected legacy that turns up goes toward building Maria a playhouse" (228). Thus, in a different sense, the reader *is* invited to identify with Maria as a version of not only Brooke's earlier self, but—by extension—the reader's earlier, more naïve self, too, with not so much an attitude of censure as of temporal hindsight. The story of Maria's coming-of-age, then, is told in the sympathetic way that one would satirize the foibles of one's own inexperienced youth. The assurance of a happy outcome results, in part, from this hint that the narrative frame is voiced as if looking backwards. Though the third-person narrator and the heroine are technically entirely distinct, the knowing reader may appreciate how they are both aspects of Brooke's public persona.

Over the course of the novel, Maria learns to control the circulation of gossip, orchestrate appearances, and play to different audiences, thereby progressively resembling the more

experienced narrator. These equivocations express a complex and ironic attitude whereby one can best subvert one's role by playing it well, just as *The Excursion* itself is best able to deconstruct the assumptions of the sentimental novel by performing its conventions. Brooke's novel demonstrates an understanding of affect not as naturalized gestures of emotion and sympathetic response, but rather as mediated by a practiced dramatic repertoire, conditioned by other actors in the marketplace, and contextualized by the restraints of indelible if, at times, nonetheless sardonically self-aware capitalistic motives. Michelle Ruggaber Dougherty notes that "the crux of the critical debates on *The Excursion* is whether private theatricals are inferior to public writing" (210). To frame the question in this way, though, misunderstands how the novel trades on Maria's theatrical ambitions as a metaphor for her changing concept of selfhood: her concept of selfhood goes from being based on spontaneous expressions of genuine, naturalized feelings to being a theatricalized construction in which she learns to participate in the spectacle of the market economy. Maria does not withdraw her writing from the public, literary marketplace, but rather renegotiates the outlets of its transmission, learning to suppress and manipulate its potentially unfavorable reception, even as she sees herself as an actor whose social standing depends on her ability to circulate, regulate, and control her emotions in order to gain desirable commodities and ends.

The ending—as predictably "happy" as it may be—highlights in rather stark terms the novel's bait-and-switch. As soon as Maria supposedly "realizes" that wealth and title are not important, she finds herself the recipient of a windfall inheritance. Perhaps what she realizes, instead, is how to *appear* above a consideration of her station in order *get* considerably above her station. The relation who has died is "so distant" and has been so disagreeable that "grief could not be supposed to have any share in the feelings," (151) further marking the absurdity that this

distant relation acts as a benefactor. If readers believe that Maria has finally renounced the town and the *ton*, it is doubtful that those readers have themselves renounced such things. In order to reward Maria for her supposed virtue, the narrative contrives a far-fetched fairy-story: a letter arrives the instant after Maria's epiphany of "two truths very important to female happiness, that it is possible to love twice, and to be happy without either a coach and six or a title" (150). The letter informs everyone that a distant kinsman, who happens to be a lord, has died and left a rich estate to the family. Not too long ago, Maria considered "a woman would be unpardonable who should *love* twice, yet there was certainly no impropriety in having a friendship for a man of distinguished merit" (145). Whereas Maria imagines that a woman capable of loving twice would have her virtue compromised, she subsequently gives up such scruples when she admits to her newfound love for Col. Herbert despite acknowledging that her love for Lord Melvile had not yet been completely extinguished.

It is possible to view Maria as an innocent who narrowly escapes the wiles of the town's corrupting influence; against this view, though, her moral evasion can be read as indicating her transformation from a naïf to a faux-naïf. Her excursion into town teaches her to equivocate and control gossip. She learns to play-act the role she once inhabited so that she can more successfully climb up the social hierarchy. In this regard, it is not so much a preposterous sentimental contrivance that Maria inherits a windfall—rather, it is a shorthand for the novelistic logic that covertly promotes (while ostensibly satirizing) performance as the springboard to advancing one's station. In other words, the inheritance is not a reward for her inherent goodness, but instead represents her successful education into the world of artifice and contrivance. Maria has gained the worldliness of the urbane narrator, and the agency to determine her own fate. This is the lesson she learns for which she finally deserves the inevitable

happy ending. The happiness of the ending is signaled not by her marriage—which is treated like an afterthought, a perfunctory generic requirement—but by her climb up the social and financial hierarchy, which have been the novel's guiding values throughout.

III. The Novel's Structural Chiasmus

The structure of the novel takes the form of a chiasmus: as Melvile awakens to the charms of sentimental fidelity, Maria transforms into a facile seducer. Though Dorignon fails to win Lord Melvile, she is granted a consolation prize of marrying a *nouveau riche* West Indian merchant above her station. Maria also fails to wed Lord Melvile—despite the fact that he ends up almost the parody of the archetypal reformed rake. Melvile, obedient to his decadent and cynical father, Lord Claremont, marries Miss Harding, a wealthy and beautiful woman who has "an air of the world, and a manner as completely French, as if she had never breathed beneath any sky but that of Versailles" (105). Indeed, the marriage helps Lord Claremont pay off the mortgage on the familial estate while, presumably, advancing the pedigree of Miss Harding. Newer money and older title unite, dissuading middle-class adventurers. Miss Harding has "success in this attack on the heart of Lord Melvile," (106) who reasons that "to keep the woman one marries" would "be droll—would be… new" (107). Miss Harding succeeds where Maria has not, in insinuating herself into Lord Melvile's affections; yet, such affection as he expresses to her and the duties he expresses to his father are also entirely aligned with maintaining his class interest. Melvile, for all his reputed vices, triumphs since he is obedient to the demands of both his class status and his father.

Melvile fails to marry Maria not only because of her status as a social inferior, but because he considers her too equivocal, possibly too designing, since she ironically appears more

affected than affectionate. Her social-climbing, he recognizes, makes her appear something more than she may be at heart. After Maria is jilted by Lord Melvile who only ever intended her for a kept mistress, she seems to take on in earnest more of those equivocal qualities that others have already attributed to her. Whereas her innocence made her appear affected, her sophistication helps her appear sincere. Maria is described as having "drest with the utmost taste and an air of *ton*" (136) by the time that Col. Herbert arrives on the scene. Col. Herbert thought it necessary to "dissemble" (137) that he had never seen her before—in fact, Col. Hebert is surprised at finding Maria with his sister since he thought Maria "a person whose character appeared to him something beyond equivocal" (137). He begins to see her in a better light, though, when she admits to her family connections, since Col. Herbert has long liked Col. Dormer: instead of posing above her rank, she admits her rustic background. It is only when Maria confesses her love for Melvile to Col. Herbert, however, that she becomes "now natural, artless, gay, vivacious, undesigning. In short, she was the Maria of Belfont, not of Berner's-street" (143). However, she artfully drops this piece of information, most likely, to pique Col. Herbert's jealousy, and thus eventually to win his affection. Though she admits to her humble Belfont heritage, we cannot suppose that her whole excursion in the city has been for naught; Maria brings the lessons of Berner's-street back with her to the country.

Soon after this supposed transformation, Lord Melvile and his new bride pass by the walls of Lady Sophia, emphasizing the boundary between Maria, inside the walls, and Melville, without. Despite the insistence with which Lady Sophia's place is described as a fortress of virtue, both Lady Sophia and Mrs. Herbert are widows who "have mixed in the *world*," (139) the latter having just returned from Paris. Tutored and protected by such ladies, Maria does not fully repent of her wiles and worldliness; rather, she learns to better manage her reputation since it

takes a large degree of artfulness to appear innocent. She learns to erect walls that prevent sentiments from leaking out, and she is educated in how to manage secrets. In fact, the wall between Maria and Melvile is not so much an inviolable wall of virtue as it is a pale of snobbery. Lady Sophia and Mr. Harding are neighbors, but Lady Sophia refuses to be on speaking terms with Mr. Harding. The narrator relates:

> Lady Sophia kept little company, and was extremely delicate in her choice of it: meer [*sic*] money was by no means a sufficient passport to the happiness of her acquaintance.
>
> She had a particular objection to admitting Mr. Harding into her coterie, which was that *his* father had been a menial servant to *hers.* (143-144)

Lady Sophia obeys the older, aristocratic hierarchy of title and land. She is contemptuous of rich, presumably mercantile, upstarts. Yet, the narrator's tone seems to gently poke fun at Lady Sophia. Lady Sophia is so egotistically imperious that she thinks Mr. Harding desires the "happiness of her acquaintance" because of her esteemed pedigree, yet this is revealed as a false delicacy of breeding belied by the fact that Mr. Harding's daughter has essentially purchased a title by marrying Melvile. Thus, Lady Sophia is the one who is reduced to merely middle-class acquaintances, such as Maria and Col. Herbert. The past is a poor dream to depend upon for one's continued social standing; but it is all that the aristocratic Lady Sophia is left with, which can assure her of her superiority—her native virtue is thus as flimsy as a withering leaf on a great family tree; the wall of her estate proves as delicate and insubstantial as property lines. She maintains her fence as a representation of her personal virtue, a fortification that symbolizes the

integrity of both her social status and her inviolably chaste body. Her self-proclaimed philosophical retreat can be viewed, rather, as a pose in the face of a world that has happily passed her by. What Maria can learn from Lady Sophia, though, is how to strike a pose that allows her to convert diminished circumstances into seeming gains, then seeming gains into real ones.

IV. Authorial Interventions and the Suppression of Scandal

Hitherto, Maria has been saved from scandal by a few lucky chances. Despite losing in her monetary wagers, she wins in unwittingly gambling with her reputation. The typesetter who receives Lady Blast's letter for the gossip pages has second thoughts about his profession. With "a wife and seven children, dependent on his labors" he nonetheless "quits his present employment" when he realizes that the scandal sheet's personages "had real existence" since he had supposedly been either naïve, self-deluded, or lunatic enough up to this moment to think that "Lord H—— and Lady M—— were beings in the moon" (119). Sentimental readers might delight in the compositor's change of heart even as they pitied his (and his family's) now destitute condition. Satirical readers, however, would be inclined to a more skeptical view, recognizing the economic pressures that keep gossip in circulation: choosing the figure of the compositor to suppress a story can be read, in this light, as an emblematic authorial intervention: a blatantly improbable deviation from realistically self-interested characters.

Such instances show how, as Barbara M. Benedict points out, the novel "satirizes sensibility" (*Framing*, 115) while the "style… dramatizes the strain between sentimental value for feeling and for restraint" (*Framing*, 116). The hand of the novelist swoops in, rescuing the heroine, by composing a fairy-tale even while pointing out the economic reality that makes

gossip remunerative. Since the novel itself trades in a type of gossip, after all, with its satiric portrait of Garrick based on Brooke's personal dealings with him, the condemnations of gossip should be taken as somewhat ironic. Gossip is relative, after all: what one takes for gossip, and what one takes for gospel, often depends on the credence (or credulity) one grants the teller. In the absence of benignant protectors, Maria is lucky that such rumors were suppressed. She later learns to spin her reputation by a web of half-truths, such as her dissimulations to Col. Herbert. Maria covets fame as a playwright but inadvertently courts infamy as a social pretender. If her plays are unfortunately denied, her reputation at least is not published. At the end of the chapter, the compositor trusts to Providence, and the narrator declares "to Providence we will leave him" (120), abandoning him to his fond or foolish choice as the narrative moves on—hinting that the authorial (or providential) hand cannot always be depended upon for generosity. The compositor may correct faults in the text, but the story of his own life is thereby put at risk.

Mr. Hammond can also be seen as an authorial surrogate since he is a critic, poet, and Maria's intermediary into the literary marketplace, a man of letters who intercepts the scandalous letter and "composedly" (122) puts it in his pocket, thus helping to both write and right Maria's story. Though he cannot gain her fame in the theatrical world, he successfully stops the spectacle of her infamy. Quixotically described as her "knight-errant" (133), Hammond is said to "have felt an enthusiastic partiality [for Maria], which, had he been younger, would have amounted to a passion" (124), though he also ventures "to act as her parent" by paying her debts (141). Not quite a parent or a lover, Hammond steps-in to occupy such missing roles; his behind-the-scenes work prevents Maria from seeming something worse than an adventurer, much as the narrator's innuendos and omissions help shape our perception of the heroine.

Near the conclusion of the novel, the party at Lady Sophia's deems him "the master of revels, with unlimited power to amuse them in whatever manner he thought proper" (144). Under that guise, he secretly leads them back to Maria's family estate. The act of returning Maria to her home is represented as "not accidental, but a surprize of his contriving… without betraying the secret" to others (148). Thus, Hammond plots a course while covering his tracks—contriving to keep secrets or suppress facts as he did previously with the scandalous letter. We are told, at another point, that Mr. Hammond "for once went out of his character, and made use of an innocent artifice" (123) in coming up with a pretense why he visited Col. Dormer. While the sentimental reader may be inclined to view Hammond as a benevolent figure who helps fix Maria's untoward gambols, the satiric reader, in light of his surreptitious dealings, may see Hammond's character as stacking the deck (in the parlance of the novel's own idiom of card play), using his artifice to inculcate a purer appearance of innocence—both for himself and for Maria—than actually exists.

Mr. Hammond, it turns out, is not an impartial judge. Initially his literary acumen as a critic of Maria's work is based on his status as a man too old to have an amorous interest in Maria and as a writer who never aspired to compose theatrical works. Both of these pretensions, however, prove false in the end. Mr. Hammond, too, has been playing the slightly duplicitous roles throughout the novel of sentimental friend and disinterested literary critic. Upon Maria's return home, he keeps Maria's uncle up half the night in a drunken reverie "to hear him protest five hundred times over, and in nearly the same words, that Cleopatra and Helen of Greece were dowdies compared to the divine Maria Villiers" (149). Mr. Hammond, we find out, "was a *bon vivant* because it was the *ton* in his youth" (148). In his inebriation at Col. Dormer's house Hammond "threw his glass over his head, and committed a thousand indecorums," which,

despite such boorishness, the narrator declares to "forgive him with all my heart" (149). The narrator indulges Mr. Hammond because his amorous interest is essentially harmless, and, in fact, has helped Maria out of her bind. Likewise, Mr. Hammond's declaration that he never desired to be a playwright is contradicted when he tells Dormer to build a theatre on his country estate where he and Maria "will, in defiance of managers, write tragedies, and play them ourselves" (152). Hammond may, in fact, be a portrait of Dr. Johnson, the boozy and sagacious literary critic of an older generation, who also wrote a play in his youth. Both posed and composed, as master of the revels, Mr. Hammond orchestrates an ending that culminates in a pastoral masque in which the characters take parts that reveal the characters they desire to be, characters—like his own—which have always been performed under a constructed guise.

Maria blushes at Mr. Hammond's authoritative allocation of Col. Dormer's money for a theater, and the exposure of herself as an author, just as she had earlier blushed at Mr. Hammond's encomium on her literary genius. Emily Bowles observes that:

> Mr. Hammond makes Maria blush because in utterly obscuring her youth, beauty, and gender in his attempt to sell her text, he reinforces his own overwhelming concern with those aspects of her person. Whether or not Mr. Hammond has sexual designs on Maria, he responds to her blushing youthful beauty as a crucial adjunct to her voice, and he takes her blushes as a nonverbal sign that she agrees with him. (151)

Maria's blush is a sign that she knows some decorum has been breached, and yet, like the narrator, she also indulges Mr. Hammond since his flattery and motives align with her own interests. Mr. Hammond is an agent for her body of work, rather than a pimp for the work of her

body—though the difference is made to seem slighter than we first suspect. Hammond arranges to keep Maria's virtuous reputation intact, so that she can get respectably married and eventually ascend the social strata. But he also leverages his "charity" toward her to reward himself with a stage on which he can play-act in tragedies they write together, probably acting as Maria's love-interest. Given that we neither see Maria write in the novel nor are we offered a sample of her tragedy, the reader's confidence in the literary merit of Maria's play falls squarely on Mr. Hammond's judgment, and we see that he ends up predisposed in her favor. Therefore, the true merit of Maria—both in her chaste intentions and her supposed literary endeavors—is shown to be more questionable than it has been initially represented.

In the scandalous letter that Hammond helps to suppress, "the malevolent history of Maria" is "described, and with some appearance of plausibility, as an adventurer, and of the most abandoned kind"; she is said to be an illegitimate daughter who gains an education to assume the "difficult *rôle* of a woman of birth… expressly for the purposes of prostitution" (130-131). Whereas the dissemination of this counter-history appears to have been narrowly avoided, the reader's glimpse into it reveals an alternative interpretation of the narrative, the satiric possibility lurking in its undercurrents, as if the reader had been denied the possibility of an epistolary novel depicting the "plausible" if not indeed true *Shamela*-esque story of Maria's history. Though the narrator chooses to render Maria's story in the ostensible guise of sentimental tale, history is nonetheless shown to be perspectival, a product of one document being censored while another gains precedence: the narrator's position of equanimity—much like Hammond's—can thus be seen as partial or equivocal. Though she is never deemed illegitimate, Maria, we are told, is an orphan whose father squandered his "decent estate in the elegant pleasures of racing, cockfighting, and drinking" while her mother died of a "broken heart" (6). Likewise, though she

never stoops to outright prostitution, the accoutrements of wealth and title often seem as alluring to her as those of love: it was the sight of "Lady H——… in a superb carriage" which first insinuated "the poison of ambition at her heart" (5). Maria ultimately assumes the role of a woman of birth, doing so in nearly the same moment that she takes on the role of an actress. By acting in her role of higher social standing, she thereby gains ownership over a fortune and agency over a playhouse, wearing the mask of innocence more assuredly once she has abandoned her naïve assumptions.

If the status of actress had potentially ribald connotations, so too did the role of a female author with which it here seems conflated. Maria is afraid that Hammond will give away her secret of being an author to her intimate circle of family and friends: "She blushed… at the idea of his being the confidant of her authorship. She hoped he had too much honour to betray her" (144). Such a statement appears ambiguously poised between referring to her authorship of the unsuccessful tragedy and her having caused the gossipy letter. Indeed, the preface to the second edition shows Brooke herself largely occupied with defending the morality of women writers against a critic who declares, "There must be a profligacy of manners before women can so utterly forget all sense of decency and propriety as to turn authors" (2). Maria emphatically does not give up writing after meeting with literary disappointment and narrowly avoiding scandal. The narrator tells us that Maria plans to insert her last, unsent letter to Lord Melvile in "her next novel" (136), and then goes on to ventriloquize the surprised reader:

> "Her next novel?" Is she not then cured of the disease of writing?
>
> Alas! my friend, it is plain you have never been an author.
>
> One rational motive of consolation remained.

Her folly in writing that letter was only known to herself. (136)

Maria will no longer address the letter to Melvile, converting the folly of her lovelorn pleas into the more pleasing, artful lore of a novelist. Again, Maria forsakes the woes of innocence for the wiles of becoming a narrator.

Given this explicit turn in Maria's ambitions from dramatist to novelist, a less directly censored medium, it is strange that Michelle Ruggaber Dougherty remarks that, "the question of whether she [Maria] will write is only answered obliquely, when Mr. Hammond suggests they build a theatre on the estate" (207). Maria is a confirmed writer, having contracted a "disease" almost as if it were a venereal contamination; she only modifies the genres and media in which she chooses to circulate her texts. As fiction, ironically, the letter can be redeemed from her shameful deception, which it once confessed. Her feelings become retroactively "true," once incorporated in a novel's fictional love story, even if the object of her original sentiment ended up being a young girl's projection. In this way Maria takes responsibility not only for the text of the letter itself, but endeavors to control its reception by taking over the means of production and distribution, as well. By withdrawing the letter from its addressee, by whom it may be given a malicious construction, she seeks to endow her work with her preferred meanings. Similarly, at the novel's conclusion, Hammond commands Col. Dormer to build a theatre, which "outs" Maria to her intimate circle as an author and reveals that Hammond has ambitions as a playwright—and this despite the narrator's insistence that he has been a disinterested judge since his literary efforts never extended to the dramatic field (indicating, in turn, the narrator's own disingenuous statements). Nevertheless, by constructing their own sylvan theatre where Maria and Hammond

perform for their intimate social circle, they can both publish their theatrical work assured of a favorable reception.

Of course, Brooke, in publicly circulating her novel, cannot be assured of such a sympathetic audience. From the novel's very first page, the narrator plays off multiple readers. The initial description of the landscape, upon which the two sisters gaze, is almost immediately repeated as a citation. Louisa can look on "the radiant lustre of the setting sun, the mixed gold and azure which played on the rustic temple, the heart-felt pleasures of retirement, the tranquil joys of a rural life" (5) and see them as earnest-minded pastoral whereas Maria already regards such a representation—described in the exact same words—as under erasure, a conventional set-piece that stands-in inadequately for an as-yet undefined bucolic ideal, already compromised and faded. Thus, the two sisters, interpreting the landscape, act as surrogates for different readers; as the narrative follows Maria as the focal character, we may think that the more satiric, knowing reader has been given the upper hand.

Nevertheless, the narrator later turns the satire upon the too-knowing reader, imploring the "Gentle Critic" and the "Man of the World" to consider the gentle charms of horticulture, comparing it to the rakish deflowering they prefer (13). Those "readers who know the world," the narrator claims, would never admit to being part of the *coterie* of "well-drest men of whom nobody ever heard, ladies of equivocal fame, and gamblers of almost every denomination," yet "nobody will be offended" by such a description "for nobody will allow themselves to be of *a certain set*" (20). The narrator thus implies that the knowing reader recognizes such a certain set because she (or in this case, he) has mingled among it, despite any protests to the contrary. In this case, the narrator's strategy seems less to satirize too-knowing readers than to disarm their potential snobbish attitude toward Maria, who is introduced into such decadent company.

The satiric, worldly reader receives a scathingly direct attack later. The reader is implicated in the circulation of malicious gossip—the deadly slander that would cause Maria's fatal fall in reputation. The narrator exclaims:

> Do you not—unfeeling as you are—by encouraging such detestable publications, wantonly plant yourself the envenomed dagger in the bosom of innocence? It is in your power alone to restrain the growing evil, to turn the envenomed dart from the worthy breast. (118)

Even this is tempered by irony, however, as it is followed by the injunction:

> Cease to read, and the evil dies of itself: cease to purchase, and the venal calumniator will drop his useless pen…. Reflect one moment, and you will execrate the barbarous pleasure you have felt on reading these slanderous chronicles of falsehood. (118)

At the end of this tirade against the reader's complicity in injuring innocence, though, the narrator blithely says, "But to our story, which has been perhaps too long interrupted" (119). In other words, the narrator does not really want the reader to cease reading; the narrator does not actually seek to shut down the mechanisms of publication. Calling the reader "unfeeling" is only another rhetorical device in this overwrought jeremiad to provoke the sophisticated, blasé reader, rousing her into a defensive tizzy or exciting her into shamefaced tears. The stridency of the narrator's tone, in contrast to her complacency to get on with the story, indicates that the indictment of the reader is really just a performance of oratory, a rhetorical sideshow. If

anything, it demonstrates that the narrator is contriving enough that one would not want to spread malicious gossip about *her*—or one could well expect a poisonous dagger in the breast. Even while defaming the mechanisms of gossip, the narrator is nonetheless demonstrating her mastery of them.

V. Anti-Sentimental Discourse

The emphasis on—and even celebration of—deceptive social-climbing may sound cynical or satiric, especially against the backdrop of what appears overtly as a sentimental novel. Nonetheless, such lessons are inculcated, for example, when the narrator directs the reader to see how such words as "virtue" and "friendship" are repeatedly compromised until they have been rendered meaningless. The narrator—abruptly interrupting a moment of free indirect discourse—declares that Col. Herbert deceives himself when he thinks to gain Maria's friendship: "Her friendship! How we are misled by words without meaning? It was her love to which he aspired, and which he resolved to gain" (142). Words such as "friendship" become placeholders in acts of self-deception wherein one reasons with equivocal terms in order to whitewash one's self-image. Likewise, the narrator eviscerates the specious catch-all of "virtue" earlier in the novel:

> *A propos*, I have often wondered at the various ideas annexed to this respectable word, virtue; a word which in ancient Rome meant public spirit; in modern Rome means a taste in the fine arts; in England, at least in the female vocabulary, means chastity; and in France has little or no meaning at all. (78)

This aside is situated directly after the narrator indulges in a quizzical paradox demonstrating that "virtuous women walk on foot" cannot be a sound conclusion since "heaven could never intend its creatures should be less happy in proportion as they deserve to be more so" (78). This virtuosic bit of sophistry foreshadows the crux of the ending, which shows Maria appearing to reject wealth and accepting it simultaneously. Whether Maria is really virtuous or merely pretending her virtue seems a moot question: virtue has little substantiality outside of its various uses and performances.

The reader may suspect that the English usage of "virtue" is to be preferred, given nationalistic prejudices, but that definition is qualified by its limitation to the "female vocabulary." Hinting of a double standard between the sexes, these various meanings of virtue also suggest that there is no stable, essential truth at the heart of either the word or the characters. Later, when the theatre manager who is a thinly veiled portrait of Garrick speaks of such things as "national taste" and "national virtue" it is dismissed as "an incoherent jumble of words without ideas" (83). Hence, rationalistic, Lockean philosophy is used to erode conservative, Lockean sentiments. Virtue ends up being, ironically, the most equivocal of terms. As Jane Sellwood notes about Brooke's earlier novels, there is "a deliberate play on conventions of feminine sensibility and subversion of them" (64). Maria can be celebrated as the good, sweet tempered innocent at the same time that her narrative trajectory and the narrator's wink to the reader imply something else again, evacuating the semantic grounds of sentimental ideology.

Throughout the novel, the narrator appears to denigrate French and Italian culture only to have the style of the discourse betray a furtive endorsement of foreign taste: the "*a propos*," for example, that frames the brief passage above is one of innumerable instances. By promiscuously dropping poetic quotes, French idioms, and references to Italian opera throughout the text, the

implied reader is assumed to be a cultivated man or (more likely) woman with wide experience of the world, particularly the continent. A contrast is often made between a sophisticated French falseness and a presumed English earnestness, with parallel differences between town and country, but such a clichéd matrix of distinctions—and distinction—is also simultaneously deconstructed, much in the manner that virtue both represents an untouchable ideal and a vacuous self-delusion. Dorignon, Lord Melvile's kept French mistress whom he later abandons, is admitted to be "uncommonly amusing" (35). Maria slowly develops Dorignon's skill of intrigue and charm over the course of the novel, so that she ultimately gains Col. Herbert only when she can artfully excuse her indiscretions. Her sister's beau, the neighbor's son Montague, is, in spite of his name (and its possible intertextual reference to Brooke's previous novel), a stolid Englishman who "never breathed any air but his native country" (36). His failure to capture the attention of the heroine is probably a sign that any admirable qualities he possesses are nonetheless outweighed by his status as a dull jingo. Inversely, Lord Melvile appears attractive almost as much for his Francophile immorality as for his inborn merits. By the novel's conclusion, even the seemingly agoraphobic Col. Dormer, an extreme homebody and the exemplary retired English country gentleman, imports a polyanthus from the Hague for his garden "fit for an emperor" (151), declaring "my duty to my prince and my country will oblige me to reside part of the year in London" (152). Thus, he, too, accepts foreign imports and the compromises of town life, when he suddenly ascends to the status of a wealthy lord.

Barbara M. Benedict captures the novel's paradox by saying, "The popular sentimental novelist Frances Brooke… challenges the assumptions of sentimental ideology even while exploiting its conventions… warn[ing] the reader against sentiment undisciplined by sense or unlicensed by society" ("Margins of Sentiment," 7). Brooke is able to exploit the conventions of

sentimental novels in order to explode the ideology underlying them. Emily Bowles states that "Brooke does not interrogate Maria's position, or suggest that she is complacent in any less-than-virtuous amatory schemes, but the question underlies much of *The Excursion*" (156). The sentimental reader is free to understand Maria as the charming ingénue who barely escapes the snares of London; however, the satiric-minded reader will notice that the ending posits Maria's return to London as a more accomplished heiress. Maria is only requested to make the manor near Belmont her "country-house" when she is not in London while Col. Dormer can reside there more of the year to "garden to infinity" (152). Bowles notes "the novel…importantly concludes with the same sort of bristling satiric ambivalence as *Candide*" (157); however, she goes on to claim that Brooke:

> gently satirizes Maria's return to the garden and forwards a model of sexual and domestic subservience in which the identity Maria forges for herself in London is concealed and corrected… Maria's desires for London, the stage, and Melvile are neatly repressed and redirected. (158)

Rather than being circumscribed into the private domestic space of Belmont's tidy gardens, as Bowles implies, Maria returns to London on surer footing, embraces her writing as a novelist and playwright, arguably sees the whole world as her stage, and gains money and title to boot, making Melvile himself quite dispensable. The ending, rather than repressing any of her desires, lavishly enacts all of Maria's wildest fantasies, gardens to infinity, and is a pageantry of wish-fulfillment. The bristling satire, then, comes with recognizing this outcome as unrealistic, and, by extension, calling the sentimental genre's bluff that virtue will be materially rewarded. Or, by

contrast, admitting that the lessons Maria has learned while in town is how to make the most of her assets, allowing her to ascend to the role of the savvy, controlling narrator in her own story. There are pleasures to be found in fantasy as well as in disillusionment; equivocation is the note most decisively struck. In either case, Maria has learned to cultivate her reputation along the "flowery road of dissipation" (17).

Sentimental novels reveal that cultural norms, especially those pertaining to class and gender, changed radically during the course of Britain's long eighteenth century, rendering claims by philosophers and others during this time period about the universality of the human condition troubled by abundant and ready-to-hand contradictions. Indeed, in this context, the Enlightenment reification of "Man" may be viewed as a defensive posture to secure the authority of ideals with waning legitimacy. While many Enlightenment thinkers argued how "Man" could base his social relations on the prerogatives of "Reason," actual masculine roles underwent significant redefinition in the emerging mercantile marketplace. The institutional structures of the church and aristocracy that abetted the traditional paterfamilias gave way to a rising and uncertain middle-class. Women gained importance as consumers who could (often implicitly) exercise greater control over the purse-strings of estates and businesses; in turn, middle-class norms of masculinity depended increasingly on obeying one's heartstrings, as concepts of authentic emotion authorized the behavior of the middle-class "man of feeling."

Nonetheless, the fraught performances of such feelings had the potential to disrupt notions of authenticity, especially with regard to the ever-present potential for self-deception or for seeking an advantage in capitalistic exchange. Many sentimental novels played off these contradictions in a milieu where gender and class identities were in the process of reshaping. Sentimental novels, far from promulgating unproblematic figures with stable identities and

genuine feelings, often represented characters or narrators who can be seen as manipulating their performances of affect, gender, and class within this new economic order. This manipulation may be unwitting (as with Abraham Adams), self-conscious (as with Maria Villiers), or indeterminate (as with the Vicar of Wakefield). Regardless, such sentimental novels become self-parodic by undoing or denaturalizing the very conventions that underwrite the sentimental discourse they observe, thereby complicating any straightforward reception of these texts as either sentimental or satiric, conservative or critical. Likewise, it may not be very helpful to view readings of sentimental novels as normative or deviant, central or marginal. Indeed, the imbrication of various and shifting stances in sentimental novels challenged readers to interrogate the narration and performance of each reader's own subject position(s). Rather than consolidating normative or established conceptions of identity, then, sentimental novels more frequently acted to foreground the rifts—and realign the values—within the eighteenth-century's available identity constructs.

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